Romanies in Italy: From National ‘Emergency’ to National ‘Strategy’ in Rome’s Campi Nomadi

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Abstract

This dissertation deals with the social exclusion of Romanies in Italy. Based on interviews with Romani individuals, institutional and Civil Society Organisations’ (CSOs) representatives, participant observation and a broad range of secondary sources, the thesis focuses on the condition of those living in ‘campi nomadi’ (nomad camps) and on the recent implementation of a state of emergency, the so-called ‘Emergenza Nomadi’ (Nomad Emergency). The enactment of this extraordinary measure concealed the existence of a long-established institutional tradition of racism and control directed at Romanies. It was not the result of a sudden, unexpected situation which required an immediate action, as the declaration of an ‘emergency’ might imply, but rather of a precise government strategy. The extreme poverty of the ‘Romanies of the camps’ should be understood as the result of a protracted institutional immobility and political vacuum, which has basically created the ‘emergency’ and the premises for the implementation of a ‘state of exception’.

Specifically, the present study focuses on the city of Rome, where the author conducted fieldwork in 2011 and 2012, and provides an investigation of the interactions between Romanies, local institutions and Third Sector organisations. It finds that national and local institutions and their sub-contracted agents have failed to promote the social inclusion of this minority group. This thesis argues that, despite rhetoric emphasising inclusion, recent efforts have arguably further disempowered, discriminated against and excluded Romani individuals and communities. The major contribution of this study is that it reveals the existence of a deeply rooted mechanism of marginalisation – the ‘camps system’—, in which corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, inefficiencies and antagonisms between a variety of competing actors have contributed to reify and crystallise the Romani condition. This thesis also uncovers significant practices of resistance within the camps.
Acknowledgements

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Lorenzo Veracini, and to Michael Leach and Linda Briskman. They have all helped this research in various ways. All translations are my own.
Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award to the candidate of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text.

To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Where the work is based on joint research or publications, this thesis discloses the relevant contributions of the respective workers or authors.

Riccardo Armillei

24 April, 2015
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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AN</td>
<td>Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIZO</td>
<td>Associazione Italiana Zingari Oggi (Italian Association Gypsies Today)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCI</td>
<td>Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana (Italian Recreational and Cultural Association)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASGI</td>
<td>Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull’Immigrazione (Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDS</td>
<td>Casa dei Diritti Sociali (House of Social Rights)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CERD</td>
<td>Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGIL</td>
<td>Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (Italian General Confederation of Labour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIT</td>
<td>Comité International Tsigane (International Romani Committee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMG</td>
<td>Roma World Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COHRE</td>
<td>Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoE</td>
<td>Council of Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRI</td>
<td>Croce Rossa Italiana (Italian Red Cross)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSOs</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAST</td>
<td>Document Authorising a Temporary Stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democratic Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECRi</td>
<td>European Commission against Racism and Intolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERPC</td>
<td>European Roma Policy Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERRC</td>
<td>European Roma Rights Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERTF</td>
<td>European Roma and Travellers Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFRC</td>
<td>International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRU</td>
<td>International Romani Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISMU</td>
<td>Fondazione Iniziative e Studi sulla Multietnicità (Foundation for Initiatives and Studies on Multi-Ethnicity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIUR</td>
<td>Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca (Ministry of Education, Universities and Research)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSI</td>
<td>Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODIHR</td>
<td>Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCI</td>
<td>Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNC</td>
<td>Roma National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSC</td>
<td>Roma, Sinti and Camminanti Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCPPHR</td>
<td>Commissione straordinaria per la tutela e la promozione dei diritti umani del Senato della Repubblica (Special Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights – Senate of the Republic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNAR</td>
<td>Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali (National Office against Racial Discrimination)</td>
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background to the study

European institutions have in the last few decades increasingly raised their concern for the situation of the Romani communities in Italy (see below, ‘Terms and Definitions’ for a description of different Romani groups in Italy). The emergence of this new interest can be better understood if placed within the perspective of two major events: the collapse of the eastern European communist regimes in 1989 and, later, the eastward enlargement of the European Union (EU). The presence of a large Romani population in Central and Eastern Europe, still mainly living in a condition of severe discrimination and marginalisation, was perceived with fear by the more prosperous Western European countries. These were basically afraid of being ‘invaded’ by poor and desperate waves of Romani migrants, whose situation had worsened after the economic and political collapse of the former Soviet bloc (Bartlett, Benini, & Gordon, 2011; Colombatto & Macey, 1998). The situation of the Romani minority groups ceased to be treated as a mere ‘external affair’ (Pogány, 2004, p. 2) and increased its political salience on the European agenda. With the aim of creating a new united community, the EU became a fertile ground for the promotion of human rights. Therefore the plight of the biggest and most marginalised ethnic minority group could no longer be ignored. Throughout the process of consolidation of the European Union, and of its institutions and mechanisms, Romani-related issues were now considered to be one of its major concerns, and the improvement of the Romanies living conditions became a pre-requisite for joining the EU (Rövid, 2011).

In Italy Romani peoples have been subjected to social exclusion and marginalisation for centuries. Only from the 1970s the Italian government started to experiment new forms of cultural protection explicitly directed to the Romani communities. These approaches were based on the premise that Romanies were nomadic people. Nomadism was addressed as a problem (Bravi & Sigona, 2006) and all government interventions towards Romani minorities were completely centred on the ‘camp’ (Piasere, 1985). It was used as the main tool for the re-education and inclusion of these peoples within mainstream society. It is in this period that the modern ‘camps strategy’ can be seen in its embryonic stage, which started to promote the stereotypical association Romanies/camps. During this period, at the end of the economic and urban boom of the 1950s and 1960s, Italy had also moved from being a net exporter of migrants to a net importer (Bonifazi, Heins, Strozza & Vitiello, 2009). The growing economic
prosperity which characterised those years saw the emergence of new problems, such as illegal immigration and the ‘racialisation’ of politics, as a consequence of the clash between an increasing diverse population and the monocultural dominant discourse (Allievi, 2010).

Attracted by the prospect of permanently settling in Italy there were also new waves of Romani immigrants. Their arrival, mainly from the Balkans, took place at different stages. This became more significant especially at the time of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and later of the EU enlargements, somehow compromising the very delicate balance that over the centuries well-established Romani communities had been trying to create with non-Romani people (Fiorucci, 2010). In 2011 the European Commission launched the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 aiming at improving the economic and social situation of this minority through the implementation of ‘common European goals’. Since then, many Romani advocates have strongly criticised this strategy, because it neither introduced real measures to combat a wide-spread anti-Roma sentiment; nor did it involve the Roma community itself (European Public Health Alliance, 2011). Nevertheless, this strategy pushed the Italian government to develop for the first time a unified policy and approach towards the Romani groups on a national level (Clough Marinaro, 2009).

In 2008, in clear continuity with previous left-wing governments (Clough Marinaro, 2009; Lunaria, 2011), the Berlusconi right-wing coalition implemented an extraordinary measure, the so called ‘Emergenza Nomadi’ (Nomad Emergency). This state of emergency aimed to solve an issue that, if in the 1970s had been categorised as the ‘Problema Nomadi’ (nomad problem) (Ministero dell’Interno, 2006, p. 16), was now described and handled as a ‘natural disaster’ (Fiorucci, 2010, p. 34). Being mainly directed to the Romani ‘camp inhabitants/dwellers’, this approach turned these peoples into a ‘security issue’ and a specific ethnic category, fuelling widespread racism and reinforcing the stereotypical binomials ‘nomad/foreign’ and ‘Romani/crime’. Although in November 2011, the ‘emergency’ was eventually declared ‘unfounded and unsubstantiated’ by the Italian Council of State (Amnesty International, 2012a, p. 8), since February 2012 a new government, led by Mario Monti, has been trying to re-endorse the same decree that in May 2008 had introduced the intervention (Associazione 21 Luglio, Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull’Immigrazione [ASGI], Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, & Open Society Justice, 2012). Contemporaneously, the Monti government had launched a National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Camminanti Communities (throughout the thesis I will simply refer to it as the ‘National Strategy’). As stated by the Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali ([UNAR], 2012b),
which is the relevant National Focal Point (NFP) designated for the elaboration and coordination of this strategy, the aim was ‘to definitively overcome the emergency phase, which has characterised the past years’ (p. 3).

**Theoretical framework**

The alarming proliferation of *'campi nomadi'* in Italy intensifies the urgency of analysing their internal mechanism and the complex relation between all the parties involved in their production and reification. This study attempts thus to delineate a novel way of understanding the relationship between ‘camp dwellers’, government agencies and Civil Society organisations (CSOs), whose interactions produced and reified what has been termed the ‘camps system’. The dissertation is focused on the ‘*campi nomadi*’ in the city of Rome, particularly the institutional ones, also known as ‘Solidarity Villages’, and the social exclusion of their inhabitants. My investigation is placed within the context of the recent governmental implementation of the ‘Nomad Emergency’ and the ‘National Strategy’. In analysing the data gathered in relation to the social phenomenon under examination, ‘core’ categories were conceptualised, leading to an empirical development of theory. A range of theoretical frameworks have been drawn upon that were useful in making sense of the interview material, participant observation and documents collected. Many social scientists have dealt with issues of citizenship rights, irregular migration, ethnicity, social exclusion, poverty and sovereign power. Their contributions have been significant for my study, supporting me in the construction of an analytical framework for interpreting the contemporary conditions of Romanies in Italy.

This study contends that the present conditions of the Romanies in Italy and their liminal status put them at the nexus of differing theoretical interpretations. To arrive at an adequate appreciation of this nexus, the three components of what I term the ‘camps system’ have been analysed separately. This approach helped to pinpoint how they have combined to produce a hegemonic perspective on Romani issues, which yields a simplistic binary interpretation of a complex and dynamic phenomenon: Romanies are generally viewed as either victims or threats, narrowing the range of responses to charity or hostility. In this context, current research stands on the side of the subjugated and against a hierarchy which produces and reproduces injustice. Only in recent years a growing awareness regarding the agency of the camps’ inhabitants has re-emerged. This was after a period in which the encamped life of these individuals was at times associated to Agamben’s (1998) notion of ‘bare life’ and Foucault’s (1976) concept of ‘biopolitics’. Nevertheless, scholars have not yet
analysed the camps as ‘resistance sites’ and ‘all-inclusive systems’ where interacting and interdependent agents form an integrated whole.

This research thus aims to uncover the hidden mechanism underlying the ‘camps system’, which involves a host of different actors, Romani individuals included. In order to promote a better understanding of its functioning, I have employed multi-theoretical framework to model multiple facets for each of its constituents. According to scholars who have adopted this approach (e.g. Austin, 2006; Berman, 2013; Mills & Bettis, 2015), by drawing together the multiple theories involved in the reality under investigation, it will be possible to produce a broader conceptualisation of human behaviours within the social environment of the ‘camps system’. Each agent has, in fact, its own effect on the reification of this mechanism and can be conceptualised differently, but their combination will allow to form a unified and all-encompassing theoretical framework.

After having analysed each subject separately, I have focused the attention on the multiple relationships existing between them. Another way to think about this process is to consider the ‘nomad camp’ at the conjunction of different type of discourses. This multi-layered framework will thus provide a basis for theorising (Smyth, 2004, cited in Berman 2013) and for generating new knowledge. This way the theory, as Wexler (1992, cited in Mills & Bettis, 2015, p. 116) argued, will come out as ‘a “fusion of horizons” between the elements of the analytic fields’. At the same time, different pathways for intervention and advocacy will result from it, eventually leading to a common understanding of this issue shared by the main agents and the elaboration of a strategy that can promote the dismantlement of the ‘camp system’.

The first layer of my analysis (Chapter III and IV) looks at the government’s approach towards Romani communities. In this section I outline the situation of the Romani ‘camp dwellers’ in Rome by looking at current theories on the use of ‘emergency’ as a frame for political action (e.g. Honig, 2009, 2014; Sigona, 2011; Walters, 2011; van Baar, 2014, 2015). In doing so, this study also offers important analyses of the historical, racial, and legal issues surrounding the treatment of this population. The work of scholars such as Hannah Arendt (1962), Giorgio Agamben (1998), Carl Schmitt (2005), Zygmunt Bauman (2007), will be also used here.

The second layer (Chapter V) is dedicated to understand the Third Sector’s role in the ‘camps system’. Here I use theories on institutional isomorphism (resource dependence theory and institutional theory) to explain how increasing rationalisation and bureaucratisation has transformed these organisations in ways that replicate the State they criticise (Di Maggio &
Powell 1983; Ranci, 1994; Townley, 1997; Barbetta, 2000; Barbetta, Cima & Zamaro, 2003; Patanè, 2003; Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin & Sudabby, 2008; Vitale & Caruso, 2009; Demeulenaere, Christiaens & De Beelde 2010; Lori, 2010; Verbruggen, Christiaens, & Milis, 2011; Federico, 2012). In the context of competitive marketplaces, CSOs (chiefly those contracted by government to work inside institutional camps) implemented coercive institutionalized models. At the same time, the adoption of charity centred/paternalistic approaches towards the Romanies could be also observed.

Finally, the third layer of my work (Chapter VI) is devoted to the Romanies living in the camps. Foucauldian writing (1977, 1990) in particular, has been used to interpret the fieldwork data collected from encamped communities. This helps an understanding of the Romanies’ response to the ‘camps policy’ as an act of resistance. While exclusionary policies have been implemented by the government, with indirect complicity of its sub-contracted agents, which paralysed any possibility of dialogue with Romani ‘camp dwellers’, these people were not mere voiceless spectators. Theories on border control were also useful to see ‘nomad camps’ as contentious spaces, which have generated both active and passive forms of resistance (Barry, 2006). This part will also draw upon contemporary application of Foucault’s work (e.g. Walters, 2011; Sigona, 2015). Literature on identity politics was also used (Asséo, 1989; Pissacroia, 1998; Gheorghe & Acton, 2001; Rivera, 2003; Kyuchukov & Hancock, 2010; Uzunova, 2010; Fischer, 2011; Solimene, 2011, 2012, 2013) in order to frame the mutual opposition between mainstream society and Romani peoples which crystallises in the context of the ‘camps system’.

The Italian Government

Instead of building capacity and autonomy among the Romani minority group, the Italian institutions chose to adopt an approach that produced and replicated the opposite effect, implementing policies which were completely centred on the institutionalisation of the Romanies in ‘camps’ (Piasere, 1985; Sigona, 2002, 2005, 2009). A number of scholars have already criticised this strategy arguing that the situation of the Romanies, both locally and nationally, is an issue characterised by political bipartisanship. Work by Clough Marinaro (2003, 2009, 2014, 2015), Daniele (2010, 2011a, 2011b) and Solimene (2011, 2012, 2013), for instance, specifically focussed on the city of Rome. But scholarly papers by Italian academics based in other cities have also pointed out the same ambiguity of the politics on Romanies: just to name a few, Bontempelli (2006, 2012) in Pisa; Brunello (1996) documenting numerous cases of this kind in Milan, Padua, Florence and Rome; Lintner (2014) in Bolzano; Però’ (1999,

‘Camp dwellers’ and ‘campi nomadi’ can be understood as liminal subjects and spaces, whose relationship with institutions, Third Sector and mainstream society is best characterised by Agamben’s (1998) notion of ‘inclusive exclusion’. Romanies are neither included, nor absolutely excluded. They have a distinctive place within Italian society. Millions of euro are spent every year on Romani-related issues. This has become a huge business involving hundreds of employees, in public and private sectors alike. Instead of merely thinking about ‘Othering’, marginalisation or exclusion, my analysis comes to grips with the approach adopted by Italian institutions in terms of ‘inclusive exclusion’. On the one hand the government invests significant sums in supposed ‘inclusion’ projects; on the other it keeps promoting the ‘politica dei campi’ (camps policy), forced evictions and emergency measures. Using Cemlyn and Briskman’s (2002) definition of ‘dyswelfare’, it can be argued that service providers failed ‘to understand, respect and respond to different cultural values, lifestyles and strengths’ (p. 49), which in turn had damaging impacts on the Romanies. Zygmunt Bauman’s (2007) interpretation of modernity contends that the authorities have consigned Romanies to the status of ‘human waste’, excluded from competing in the job market and relegated to marginalised areas.

Hannah Arendt’s (1962) analysis of the legal and political paradoxes of the Rights of Man can help to frame the presence of people forced to live within a society but with no recognised right of belonging. The essence of superfluity explained by Arendt in the closing pages of The Origins of Totalitarianism equates with the living conditions of Romanies in camps and forms a continuing theoretical thread throughout the thesis. The Romani/‘abjected’ is never utterly irrelevant or absolutely useless and maintains a crucial relationship with the society/‘abjector’. It constitutes the antithetical ‘Other’ in relation to which the abjector self is defined. The perception of Romanies as a threat was not caused by their presence or their arrival from foreign shores but was actively fostered by the government through a process of dehumanising each Romani in society’s midst. As Hepworth (2012) argued, they are constructed as ‘permanent migrants’, which normalise their confinement in the abject space of the ‘nomad camp’. In this context, they become ‘abjects’, neither subjects, nor objects, living ‘inexistent states of transient permanence’ (Isin & Rygiel, 2007, p. 198). It was the institutional immobility and indifference to their living conditions that turned the Romanies into ‘popoli delle discariche’ (peoples of the rubbish dumps) (Piasere, 2005). Decay and abandonment,
which by now constitute a common feature in these encampments, then created the ‘emergency’ and the pretext for extraordinary measures.

The ‘Nomad Emergency’ and ‘National Strategy’ represent the clearest examples of the contradictory approach adopted by public institutions. The Italian Government, responding to a European Union request, introduced several measures to tackle the causes of marginalisation and social exclusion of Romanies. Their condition was defined as a ‘humanitarian emergency’ (Sigona, 2009, p. 277) and a ‘humanitarian problem’ (Clough Marinaro & Daniele, 2011, p. 621), conceptualisations which match with what Walters (2011) calls the ‘emergence of the humanitarian border’ (p. 138). The humanitarian construction of the measures towards the Romanies turned them in something acceptable within strategies of control. This goes well together with van Baar’s (2014) ‘reasonable anti-Gypsyism’. In other words, the belief that they would otherwise be involved in ‘illegal’ practices that could harm ‘our’ rights and freedoms justifies a differential treatment of the Romanies (van Baar, 2015).

Their implementation, though, was in the end rather ineffective or even counterproductive. The first type of intervention portrayed Romani issues merely as a security matter. This kept reviving old stereotypes, legitimising discriminatory, and even violent, actions against them. The second type, instead, which aimed at transcending the emergency phase and finding valid alternatives to the ‘camps policy’, neither had any influence over institutional attitudes nor did it increase the involvement of Romani representative bodies.

Agamben’s (1998) work is again useful here when it comes to interpreting government strategy. Declaring a state of emergency not only tightened the security measures, but the ‘state of exception’ has gradually become the norm. Sigona (2005) used the expression of ‘permanent emergency’, as a new political category to describe it. Marinaro (2009), instead, described the Romanies as forced into a condition of ‘perpetual nomadic outsideness’ (pp. 270-271), which justified the constant construction of a state of emergency. At the same time, ‘nomad camps’ become spaces suspended in a state of ‘permanent temporaneity’ (Marinaro, 2015, p. 3). The ‘emergency’ was designed to contain a problem rather than solve it definitively, and in so doing establish a permanent practice of exclusion and marginalisation. This involves a sovereign decision to suspend the law and Agamben follows Carl Schmitt in declaring that this power places the sovereign at once inside and outside the legal order. As Agamben further notes, through the state of exception, the sovereign has created and guaranteed the situation that the law needed for its own validity. The fact that in May 2013 the Italian Supreme Court declared the ‘Emergenza Nomadi’ unlawful did not eliminate emergency approaches towards the Romanies.
Honig’s work (2009, 2014) helps to make this point more clear, reminding us that emergencies are much more common than we think. In this context, by ‘de-exceptionalising the exception’, she argues that the camps stop being exceptions to the legal-political normality of liberal democracy, and become ‘significant markers of the fundamentally postpolitical and biopolitical condition of late modernity’s normality/emergency’ (Honig, 2014, pp. 46-47). In addition, as Honig (2009) further states, political emergencies are not just the result of sovereign state power, but reflect and constitute the character of a people. Sovereignty, in fact, is only effectual if there is popular support to the decision.

In another work (Armillei, 2014) I have dealt more fully with the ‘Emergenza Nomadi’ within the Italian historical context. In that article I argued that the lack of an in-depth and cohesive analysis of national history was detrimental to the acknowledgment of government approaches as a ‘temporal continuum’. Attitudes towards cultural diversity, and Romanies in particular, have been clearly affected by a history of authoritarian tendencies, a monoculture catholic national narrative and well-established racist attitudes. Controversial issues, such as the internment and extermination of the Romani minority groups during the Second World War (‘Porrajmos’ in the Romani language), have never been adequately analysed or politically addressed. That the ‘camps policy’ can be implemented without provoking public discomfort suggests an ongoing legacy of Fascist/Nazi persecution in Italian society.

‘Terzo Settore’/Third Sector/CSOs

Distinct from the ‘business or private sector’ (market) and the ‘public sector’ (State), ‘civil society’—‘Terzo Settore’ (Third Sector)\(^1\) is the definition commonly adopted within the Italian context—may be also understood as an ‘intermediate space of society’ (Patanè, 2003, p. 2). It constitutes a complex system composed of a wide range of actors from various organisational and juridical settings ‘that seek to bring about positive social and environmental change’ (United Nations Global Compact 2010, para. 10). It is today a highly debated concept which ‘has many different definitions and interpretations spanning across time’ (Boose 2012, p. 310). The European roots of this term are traceable to the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. According to Keane (2010), it is particularly during the revolutionary period 1750–1850, that

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\(^1\) Because of its specificity, the Third Sector ‘is always spelt with capital letters’ (FrancoAngeli, 2011, p. 8). In the course of this dissertation when referring to Third Sector organisations I will also use the acronym CSOs.
the traditional language of civil society (societas civilis), which had until then referred to a peaceful political order governed by law, underwent a profound transformation. Contrasted with government, civil society meant a realm of social life – market exchanges, charitable groups, clubs and voluntary associations, independent churches and publishing houses – institutionally separated from territorial state institutions. This is the sense in which civil society is still understood today. (p. 461)

For a long period of time, after 1850 up until the last few decades, the concept disappeared from political theory becoming ‘arcane’. In the 1980s, though, ‘civil society’ was revitalized ‘by the Polish opposition movement and the subsequent wave of democratisation around the world’ (Howard 2010, p. 186). It is particularly during the last couple of decades that we can assist to an exponential growth of this sector. The definition of ‘civil society’ adopted by the World Bank (2013), which was developed by a number of leading research centres, refers to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations. (para. 5)

The Third Sector enjoys no accepted definition in the Italian legal system (Corbisiero, Scialdone and Tursilli, 2009; Patanè, 2003). Until recently, this sector was ‘relatively unknown to a large share of the population, to the media and probably to the legislator himself’ (Barbetta, 2000, p. 136). In the last two decades neither the ‘State’ nor the ‘market’ has coped with changes in the demographic structure that have generated demands for new services (Barbetta, 2000). So Third Sector organisations sprang up in response to these demands (which usually involved health care, educational, recreational and cultural services) coming mainly from local public authorities, but also, to some extent, from private citizens.

Rossi (2010) uses the expression ‘social emergencies’ (p. 218) when referring to them. This definition relates more closely to the main feature of the Italian approach to collective needs and public services, as well as to the topic of this research project. During the 1990s, the rise of what has been defined as a ‘welfare mix’ brought about not only greater involvement of
non-profit organisations in welfare politics, but also the establishment of informal arrangements between public authorities and CSOs which were mediated by political patronage (Ranci, 1994, p. 247). Despite the fact these organisations are contracted by local governments through a system of public bidding which in the 2000s became more transparent (Patanè, 2003), a proportion of public procurement notices continues to conceal the existence of special agreements rooted in political patronage (Fazzi, 2011; Springhetti, 2009).

The employment of the institutional theory helps highlighting how this tendency within the non-profit sector is particularly evident when there is funding dependence from government (Townley, 1997), which is generally the most important source of income (Anheier & Salamon, 2006). In the case of the sub-contracted agents working within ‘nomad camps’ a dichotomous behaviour resulted from the constraining influences of isomorphic mechanisms: on the one hand, contestation of government policies; on the other hand, compliance with government requirements. At the present time there is no study specifically focusing on the controversial relationship between Third Sector and the ‘nomad camps’; this research sheds light on the ways in which they operated. More in general, although Third Sector constitutes a driving force of welfare development and social change there is still very little empirical evidence regarding how innovative they are (Fazzi, 2011). There is rather evidence of the impact of public policies on Third Sector’s internal dynamics (Vitale & Caruso, 2009).

Because of the financial and economic crisis, particularly in the last decade, public resources towards the social sector have been constantly decreasing at the expense of service quality. This had direct repercussions for Third Sector organisations, since local institutions kept outsourcing their work to them. For instance, in 2007 almost 50 per cent of municipal expenditure for social services was sub-contracted externally (Springhetti, 2009, p. 39). Fazzi (2011) argues that this situation, together with increasing pressure towards cost rationalisation and growing competition (often as a consequence of lowest bid auction mechanisms; Springhetti, 2009), confirmed theses about Third Sector’s dependency on public institution, with isomorphic behaviours as side effects (Di Maggio & Powell 1983; Barbetta, Cima & Zamaro, 2003; Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin & Suddaby, 2008; Demeulenaere, Christiaens & De Beelde 2010; Lori, 2011; Verbruggen, Christiaens, & Milis, 2011; Federico, 2012).

In particular, forms of coercive and mimetic isomorphism could be observed during the fieldwork. For instance, both the CSOs dealing with Romani-related issues (mainly those involved in the ‘camps system’) and the city council departments seldom publish the results of their activities or try to generate a better understanding of the Romanies’ plight. It was thus very difficult to gain a clear understanding of the way institutions and CSOs operate. A lack of
official reports, and other studies detailing budgets, objectives, strategies and outcomes, made it impossible to evaluate these organisations scientifically via the elaboration of empirical indices.

Another problem was the extreme difficulty of getting in touch with them. Public offices either did not answer phone calls or did not reply to emails requesting formal interviews. In the rare cases when they made representatives available, they insisted on anonymity. On approaching the representatives of the organisations hired by councils to administer the ‘campi nomadi’, a similar situation emerged. These were some of the questions asked via email or during interviews:

- Did you develop any cost-benefit analysis? Did you periodically verify whether your interventions were succeeding? How did you measure outcomes?
- How did you define Romanies’ needs? Was there any form of consultation with them? How did you measure whether your actions met their needs? How satisfied with your actions were they?
- Is there any ‘round table’ at which all parties involved (institutions, CSOs, Romani representatives) can discuss strategies aimed at improving the Romanies’ lot?
- How much of the available budget goes to the actual projects? What are your overheads?
- Do you allow third parties to evaluate your work? How much publicity do you give your activities (i.e. by holding conferences or publishing reports and plans)?

CSOs’ and other institutions’ representatives either did not reply or said detailed information was unavailable. In conclusion, it was generally unclear what public agencies and CSOs did, why, how and with what results for the Romani peoples. An atmosphere of secrecy and scarcity of material complicated the collection of data on management of the camps.

The Romani ‘camp dwellers’

A number of authors have described the condition of the ‘Romanies of the camps’ in Italy as institutionalised within a system of ‘patrol and surveillance’. Rossi (2010) conceptualised the encampments as physical spaces where Roma were ‘forced to live’ (p. 3). Bravi and Sigona (2006) analysed the camp as ‘non luogo’ (no man’s land), a place whose purpose was to confine the ‘Other’ and where individuals lost their sense of self. Ronald Lee (2002) used the expression ‘Kaliseria’, which in Romanes (the Romani language) means ‘a
place between Earth and Heaven’, to describe the camp. Nicola (2011) termed it a ‘total institution’ that dehumanised Romanies, leaving them with no real opportunity to be included within Italian society. Nicola’s intuition is a clear adaptation to the contemporary situation of the ‘nomad camps’ of 1961 Erving Goffman’s work on totalitarian social systems. Clough Marinaro (2009), instead, described Romanies often using Agamben’s (1998) conceptualisation of the concentration camp, reduced to a ‘bare life’ upon which the state can inscribe its sovereign power without restriction.

The camp thus produces and replicates the idea of the Romanies as ‘a “monstrous hybrid” of humanity and bestiality’ (Todesco 2004, Piasere 2006, cited in Solimene 2013, p. 171) which in turn has served the purpose of justifying the implementation of exceptional measures. This study argues, that the ‘camp’ is not just an exogenous institutional means of control and segregation (Bravi & Sigona, 2006; Nicola, 2011; Sigona, 2002, 2005, 2009) but also an endogenous tool of resistance to government assimilative efforts, which produce self-ghettoisation as a side effect (Asséo, 1989; Calabrò, 2008; Piasere, 2005). As a consequence my analysis sheds new light on the experience of ‘camp dwellers’. Over the years the ‘campi nomadi’ have become a ‘battlefield’, an arena of conflict between Romanies and non-Romanies; not productive space for conflict, as Solimano (1999) posited, from which valid solutions could emerge, but rather a site where oppressor and oppressed form and crystallise their own identities as homogenous entities, each in opposition to the other.


By drawing upon Wacquant’s (2011) analysis of the ‘ghetto’ as a Janus-faced institution of ethnoracial closure, Clough Marinaro (2015) recognises Rome’s institutional camps’ function as a protective shield, which fosters ‘active forms of identification, resistance, and mobilisation from within’ (p. 11). This is clearly in opposition with previous one-dimensional view of camps as isolating and confining spaces for an unwanted ethnic group (Clough Marinaro, 2009). Sigona (2015) uses Levy’s (2010) work on refugee camps in order to distance himself from previous Agambian’s interpretation of the camp (Sigona, 2005; Bravi & Sigona, 2006). In this new work Sigona (2015) acknowledges, more vigorously than in the past, the strategies of resistance, adaptation, and contestation that ‘camp dwellers’ develop in their everyday lives. Active resistance is also documented by Solimene (2013) in his work, which specifically refers to the Bosnian Xoraxané Romá living in illegal encampments.
A number of Romani intellectuals as well, referred to the ‘Romanies of the camps’ in Rome as ‘fighters’ or ‘warriors’ (their contribution relies more on personal interviews and will be dealt specifically in Chapter VI). According to them, Romanies have learned to take advantage of their marginal condition. They have been exploiting the old ‘Gypsy’ stereotypes for their personal gain, mainly as a way of obtaining welfare aid, while simultaneously blaming others: governments, CSOs and mainstream society. They basically occupy an ‘in-between’ position partly imposed on them by outside forces and partly of their own volition. This also shows the Romanies’ ability to simultaneously transcend and reinforce existing social and cultural boundaries (Marotta, 2011b, p. 193).

Carrasco (2011) uses the concept of ‘warriors’ to underline the fact that for centuries the Romanies resisted the ‘colonisation of their way of life by any means necessary’ (para. 6). In 1989 Asséo coined the definition ‘peuples-Résistances’ (Resistance-peoples), which described how Romani peoples resisted assimilation and expressed what she calls an ‘internal counter-hegemony’. As Pissacroia (1998) argued, the ‘Gadje people’ constitute a mirror image of the Romanies’ own identity (p. 398), but were also the main source of their sustenance (Benedetto, 2011). At the same time, Rivera (2003) maintains that determination to resist is a sign of an isolationist and ethnocentric culture (Uzunova, 2010).

This dissertation places the analysis of the Romani issue in the context of a deeply rooted opposition between a majority group and a minority. For the dominant culture the ‘Other’, par excellence, is the ‘Zingaro’, while for the Romanies this corresponds to the ‘Gadje’, which in Romanes stands for the entire non-Romani population (Benedetto, 2011). Both these terms are derogatory and reflect a deep-rooted mutual antagonism between the groups. This manifests itself in two different, and opposing, ways in each of them: an assimilationist approach adopted by mainstream society and an attitude of refusal and rejection on the part of the minority group’s members. The strong sense of cultural belonging and superiority on both sides of today’s divide represents an obstacle to mutual understanding and positive dialogue. The existence of this separateness between Romani communities and mainstream societies led Gheorghe and Acton (2001) to coin the term ‘Gypsy archipelago’ (p. 55). On the one hand, this expression describes the diversity of various sub-groups and meta-groups, with their cultural, religious, linguistic and geographical affiliations. On the other, despite the great internal diversity that characterises Romani communities around the world, a unifying factor could be found in their blunt opposition to the ‘Gadje world’ (Fischer, 2011; Kyuchukov & Hancock, 2010).
Contradicting Agamben’s categories, camp-dwelling Romanies have not been reduced to a ‘bare life’, which denotes a state of complete submission where the state can exert its sovereign power unfettered. The meeting of state and ‘camp dwellers’ has not actually produced a definite seat of power and a passive subject respectively. Most writing on the topic emphasises the superior power of the State and its sub-contracted CSOs, which in effect exercise sovereignty over the population and civic status of the ‘Romanies of the camps’. However, this addresses only one aspect of the power relationship. Foucault’s (1977, 1990) re-conceptualising of power was particularly useful in understanding how power flowed through and between Romani individuals, groups, and institutional and Third Sector agencies. The ‘Romanies of the camps’ and their ‘Gadje’ antagonists are not presented as part of a ‘powerful’/’powerless’ dichotomy, where actors are fixed and polarised in restrictive categories. Using the work of Foucault it is possible to see how ‘subjugated’ knowledge can challenge the strategy enacted by the dominant elite to establish, renew and maintain the hierarchy underpinning their privilege. Although relations between the State, the CSOs and the Romani residents are shaped by an unequal struggle, the opposition between ‘rulers’ and ‘ruled’ gives rise to a cycle of power and resistance. Using Foucault’s (1990) words: ‘Where there is power, there is resistance’ (p. 95).

The intertwined relationship between different agents involved in the ‘camps system’ can be summarised as follows. Administrations carry out forced evictions, breed new camps and violate human rights, instead of implementing real social inclusion policies. At the same time, as recent studies pointed out, there is evidence showing a ‘mutual accommodation’ structure of relation between the non-profit and the public sector. The main tendency, in fact, is for the State to vacate its responsibility to non-profit organisations, while exerting coercive pressure through stringent and non-transparent funding regulations. Resource dependence and coercive isomorphism has thus prevented the Third Sector from being fully independent. This situation also reveals the incapacity of both public institutions and the Third Sector to find a more constructive dialogue with Romani agencies. But, as well as the top-down approach adopted by government and CSOs, this study also confirms a recent trend to describe Romani communities living in camps as actively performing a bottom-up opposition. The centuries-old cultural and economic survival strategy of many Romani communities also needs to be understood in the context of the ‘camps system’. In turn, the case of the Romani peoples is placed in the context of current Italian debates surrounding the notion of interculture. This is not the main focus of the present study, but the situation of the Romanies provides a valuable starting point for an appraisal of Italian approaches to cultural diversity. Italy has become
increasingly diverse in the last few decades, yet an official policy addressing the issue of a multicultural citizenship is still missing and interculturalism has been only applied within the educational system. In the next two sections I will provide a brief account of interculturalism in Italy, while looking at the broader international debate on cross-cultural policies.

The intercultural paradigm: The ‘Italian way’ to cultural diversity²

Over recent decades interculturality has become increasingly important in a number of European countries. After a first phase of celebratory acceptance of multiculturalism, the European countries (chiefly France, Germany, Britain, Belgium and The Netherlands) that had invested in this cross-cultural paradigm have all recently declared it a failure (Emmett Tyrrell, 2011). Moving away from the previous model, they all started to implement the concept of interculturalism, embracing ‘the idea of a fruitful exchange between different cultural groups that will enrich the whole society’ (European Commission, 2009a, p. 3). This epochal shift should be interpreted in the context of the 9/11 terrorist attack and the internal building of the European Union. The intercultural approach not only aimed to support a strategy of recognition and respect for human diversity, as implied by multicultural theory, but it also valorised ‘the positive content of the dynamics of exchange and the notion of identity’ (Pompeo, 2002, p. 134). Multiculturalism simply promoted the pure coexistence of multiple cultures (Bissoondath, 2002; Pompeo, 2002). Interculture instead ‘entails a theory and method of understanding that occurs cross-culturally; it entails a willingness and, one would assume, an ability to move across cultural boundaries’ (Marotta, 2014). It basically endorses a perspective which is aimed at favouring a genuine cross-cultural communication and the constructive management of diversity.

This new approach is now playing an important role in fostering a new European identity and citizenship (Vidmar-Horvat, 2012). The year 2008 was even proclaimed European Year of Intercultural Dialogue by the European Parliament and the member States of the European Union (EU), with the aim of developing a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices and of increasing socio-political participation and equality. During the same year the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue was launched by the Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs, arguing that interculturalism should be the preferred

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² This section and the next one both draw upon Armillei (forthcoming), a specific study in which I discuss multiculturalism and the management of cultural diversity in Italy, focusing on the case of the Romani community. Presenting an analysis of the ‘via Italiana’ (the Italian way) of promoting intercultural education, my appraisal of current policies reveals an essentially ethnocentric and assimilative approach to educational and social policies that positions the majority/dominant group as the point of departure and end for managing cultural diversity in Italy.
model for managing cultural diversity in Europe. Multiculturalism, a policy that was now defined as ‘inadequate’ was thus replaced by this ‘work in progress and work of many hands’ approach (CoE 2008b). As Kymlicka (2012) noticed, the new intercultural trend was also welcomed by the UNESCO in its 2008 World Report on Cultural Diversity, which somehow signed the beginning of a more global consensus. With regard to Romanies, in 2009 the European Platform for Roma Inclusion was launched, leading to approval of the Ten Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion, one of which was the intercultural approach (UNAR, 2012b, p. 13).

The multicultural paradigm has never taken root in Italy. At the beginning of the 1990s, instead, a lively debate on intercultural issues started to emerge. The growing presence of foreign students had prompted the Government to introduce a new paradigm, particularly within the Italian educational system. In 1995 the Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca (Ministry of Education, Universities and Research [MIUR], 1995, p. 109) issued a document, the Circolare Ministeriale (Ministerial Memo No. 205/90), which for the first time introduced the concept of “intercultural education”, with the following definition:

The primary goal of intercultural education is the promotion of a constructive coexistence within a composite cultural and social framework. Not only does it entail acceptance and respect of the other, it also promotes the recognition of cultural diversity while encouraging dialogue, mutual understanding and mutual transformation.

In 2007 Italy even proclaimed its own model of cultural diversity, La Via Italiana per la Scuola Interculturale e l’Integrazione degli Alunni Stranieri (the Italian way to intercultural school and the integration of foreign students) (McSweeney, 2011).

According to this document issued by the MIUR (2007, pp. 8–9), the Italian school system is guided by four main principles: (1) Universalism: in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by the Government in 1991, education is promoted as the fundamental right of every child; (2) Communal schooling: all students are enrolled in ‘normal classes’, thus avoiding the creation of ‘special or separate classes’ for foreigners; (3) Centrality of the individual in relation to the ‘Other’: the educational project places particular attention on the uniqueness of each student; (4) Interculturalism: in adopting an intercultural perspective, diversity in all its forms is considered a paradigm of school identity. The Italian intercultural model is based on a ‘dynamic conception of culture’ which
acknowledges ‘cultural relativism’ while promoting social cohesion and the building of common values.

With specific regard to the schooling of Romani children, inclusive approaches had been in place since the 1950s. At that time, schoolteachers, acting mainly on a voluntary basis, initiated the first experiments in inclusivity within the system of compulsory education (Rossi & De Angelis, 2012). The first really systematic schooling of Romanies began in 1965 with the creation of ‘Lacio Drom’ (literally ‘good journey’ in Romanes) courses. But, as Fiorucci (2011, p. 187) argues, these ‘special classes’ ended up with Romani children categorised as ‘special’ and ‘different’. Only in 1982 were these classes abolished. In 1986 the MIUR issued Circolare 207, officially extending compulsory schooling to all Romani children (Rossi & De Angelis, 2012). During the 1990s, in line with the advent of intercultural education in the school system, legislative acts confirming the right to an education started to favour the generic category ‘foreign students’, which embraced the non-Italian Romanies.

‘Multiculturalism’ versus ‘Interculturalism’

In recent years a heated debate has developed around the concepts of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘interculturalism’. Particularly, scholars from émigré societies such as Canada and the UK (e.g. Kymlicka, 2012; Meer & Modood, 2012; Taylor, 2013), are now trying to analyse and compare the two approaches at times implying a distinction between a ‘bad multiculturalism’ and a ‘good interculturalism’ (Kymlicka, 2012, p. 211). Drawing on the analysis of Meer and Modood’s (2012) work, which at the present recognizes multiculturalism as a better political orientation to cultural diversity, Kymlicka (2012) explains that there is ‘very little intellectual substance’ underlying the trend to approach interculturalism, as a new, innovative, realistic approach, compared to a supposedly tired, discredited, naive ‘multiculturalism’.

Contrasting the claims in the 2008 EU ‘White Paper’ regarding post-war Western Europe embracing relativist and segregationist multiculturalism, Kymlicka (2012) suggests that ‘interculturalism’ was basically introduced ‘as a remedy for failed multiculturalism’ (p. 213). While multiculturalism is now ‘offered up as a sacrificial lamb, a handy scapegoat for popular discontent’ (p. 214), he argues, interculturalism could be better described as a form of ‘political rhetoric/theatre’. The main purpose of this shift from multiculturalism to interculturalism was just a way to create and establish a new narrative/myth. Another Canadian scholar, Charles Taylor (2013), seems to reinforce perfectly Kymlicka’s viewpoints. As Taylor puts it, in fact,
the European attack on ‘multiculturalism’ often seems to us a classic case of false consciousness, blaming certain phenomena of ghettoization and alienation of immigrants on a foreign ideology, instead of recognizing the home-grown failures to promote integration and combat discrimination. (p. 2)

According to Taylor, the current anti-multicultural rhetoric in Europe would reflect ‘a profound misunderstanding of the dynamics of immigration into the rich, liberal democracies of the West’ (p. 2). Taylor explains that although initially immigrants tend to create networks with people of similar origins and background in order to adapt to the new environment, their major motivation is to find new opportunities. It is only when their hopes for integration are frustrated that a sense of alienation and hostility to the receiving society can grow. It is thus a failure of the host society to implement multicultural policies which would radicalise certain segments of immigrant communities. As a matter of fact, Kymlicka (2012, p. 214) argues,

[…] the evidence suggests that popular discontent with immigrants is in fact higher in countries that didn’t embrace multiculturalism, and there’s no evidence that adopting multiculturalism policies causes or exacerbates anti-immigrant or anti-minority attitudes.

What seems to emerge from the analysis of the work of these scholars has a two-fold implication. On the one hand, claims regarding the superiority of interculturalism over multiculturalism cannot be proven theoretically or empirically. On the other, interculturalism does not yet offer a ‘distinct perspective’. As a consequence, ‘at present, interculturalism cannot, intellectually at least, eclipse multiculturalism, and so should be considered as complementary to multiculturalism’ (Meer & Modood 2012, p. 175).

Although the standpoints expressed by the supporters of multiculturalism can be quite understandable—especially in the light of the Western European failure in implementing ‘real’ multiculturalism—the interventions made by Kymlicka, Meer, Madood and Taylor refer to a very specific context. There is, in fact, an ongoing ideological battle between ‘multicultural (Anglophone) Canada’, which represents the majority of the population, and prevalent ‘intercultural (Francophone) Québec’. This open confrontation has a long history of separatist movements behind it. The largely French-speaking province of Québec has been openly aspiring to independence for decades. The sovereignty question promoted by Quebecers can
thus account for why interculturalism has been chosen over multiculturalism. Taylor (2013, p. 5) suggests, ‘multiculturalism could never take in Quebec’ and finds highly understandable a call for interculturalism instead. At the same time, though, he also stresses the fact that there are no real differences between the intercultural and multicultural approaches.

Despite the fact multiculturalism seems to be described here as the right approach to follow, the Canadian case is not free from internal criticism. For instance, Muslim Canadian Congress founder, Tarek Fatah (in Davidson, 2011, para. 3), on the subject of the 2006 Toronto 18 terrorist plot, argues that ‘Canada has been too tolerant in allowing Muslim immigrants to settle into closed communities, some of which preach Islamic values and a hatred toward the West’. Wong (2010) refers to the non-acceptance of multiculturalism by a consistent part of mainstream Canadian society. Other problems, often associated with multiculturalism, such as the development of ethnic enclaves, and the correlated risk of creating a mere mosaic of cultures rather than practical were also reported in a number of studies (e.g. Kunz & Sykes 2007; Qadeer 2003; Preston & Lo 2009). In 2003 Fawcett (p. ii) even claimed that instead of working towards equality for all individuals, multiculturalism in Canada was devoting itself to ‘a subtle form of cultural gerrymandering’.

But the Canadian model is not the only ‘successful’ multicultural paradigm to face criticism today. Australia, also considered one of the forefathers of multicultural policies in the 1970s, has been experiencing a series of ups and downs over the years. Particularly it faced its darkest time during the ‘Howard era’. For more than a decade, during the conservative Howard government (1996–2007) era, ‘the idea that Australia is a multicultural society has disappeared completely, leaving a bare recognition of cultural diversity as a demographic fact, rather than any sense of a multicultural policy framework’ (Jakubowicz, 2009, p. 9). Hage (2000, p. 18) arguing that Australian multiculturalism has a ‘white-centric’ past and an assimilationist present, coined the definition of ‘White Multiculturalism’, where the dominant culture plays a central role in mixing the migrant cultures, which are depicted as mere voiceless ingredients. In other words, just like the previous ‘white Australia’, ‘multicultural Australia’ has also been the result of a top-down political action, driven by the desire to assimilate European immigrants within the dominant culture (Tilbury, 2007).

**Key arguments and research questions**

The Romani experience in Italy constitutes a case unique in the European context, as Italy is the only country whose official policy is to institutionalise its Romani population inside urban ‘ghettos’ (European Roma Rights Centre [ERRC], 2000; Clough Marinaro, 2009).
Analysing this context reveals a series of anomalies resulting from the simultaneous interplay of several agencies. The growing attention to Romani-related issues, both nationally and internationally, led to the establishment of a complex system that a range of actors found appetising: private and public, left- and right-wing political alignments, Romanies and non-Romanies. Together with a political vacuum, the Romani issue is commonly ascribed to an institutional mechanism of repression. In the course of my dissertation I will argue that the Romanies’ current situation has, rather, been produced by a mix of interrelated factors: a highly politicised issue characterised by bipartisan convergence; the Third Sector’s dependence on welfare and an incapacity to act in the interests of its Romani beneficiaries; and, finally, a failure to understand the attitude of the Romani peoples as an act of ‘resistance’.

The situation of Romanies in Italy will be placed in the context of the Italian approach to cultural diversity. Although in the last few decades the Italian population has become increasingly diverse, Italy can be hardly defined a multicultural society, a concept and a model that are rather missing (Allievi, 2010). The Italian approach to cultural diversity rather oscillates between a well-rooted ethnocentric monoculturalism and an underdeveloped discourse around interculturalism. This paradigm has become a ‘trendy’ concept and been adopted by local authorities and CSOs, particularly within the school system. Yet, intercultural rhetoric, especially in relation to the social inclusion of the Romani peoples, has been too often used automatically and uncritically (Interculture Map, 2006, para. 3). Romanies, particularly those living in camps, are generally seen as exogenous elements in Italian society and are expected either to assimilate to the dominant culture or to be removed/expelled, in the worst case. Although interculturalism has the merit of promoting genuine cross-cultural relations, through dialogue, confrontation, and, most importantly, reciprocal re-configuration of one’s own beliefs and identity, the prevailing trend in Italy is rather the defense of a catholic, monocultural national identity (Allievi, 2010) and is still ‘struggling with the overall social inclusion project’ (McSweeney 2011, p. 4).

With specific regards to the Romani peoples, it is in place an open conflict which has been ongoing for centuries between ‘Gadje’ and ‘Zingari’. Both of them keep constructing and reifying a strong sense of belonging in opposition to the other. This is accentuated by the fact that Romani peoples do not get the possibility to fully retain and promote their own identity. It will be thus argued that the Italian government needs to reaffirm its commitment to the promotion of cultural diversity, valorizing immigration and multiculturality as valuable resources. The choice to invest more efficiently on a ‘real’ inter-cultural practices might represent a valuable solution for reducing a reciprocal racial hatred, provided that first are
created the premises for an equal and mutual dialogue, in particular the recognition of the Romanies as a national cultural minority. At the moment, in fact, their relation is clearly unbalanced. My thesis does not aim to reject the intercultural theory *per se*, but its future implementation as an official approach to cultural diversity depend on the recognition that at the moment its foundation lays on very unstable grounds.

By studying the case of the Romani peoples, this doctoral research project aims to answer the following research questions:

1) What role does the ‘Nomad Emergency’ play in marginalising and disempowering Romanies?
2) Should Romanies be constructed as victims or agents in representations of the ‘Romani problem’ in Italy?

My thesis is that the decision to declare a ‘state of emergency’, which defined Romanies as ‘nomads’ and a ‘natural disaster’ (Fiorucci, 2010, p. 34), was used by the government merely as a way to acquire more power and take an authoritarian approach towards Romani individuals and communities. The declaration of the state of emergency brought a reinforcement of the security measures. Besides, the ‘state of emergency’ has gradually become the rule, as posited by Agamben (1998), and served to cover a prolonged situation of institutional abandonment and neglect. This in turn became the pretext for implementing emergency measures – disproportionate to the severity of the threat – while blaming the Romanies themselves. The contemporaneous commitment of the Italian Government to a ‘National Strategy’ for improving Romani living conditions, although representing an unprecedented attempt at inclusion of these minority groups, not only failed to empower them: it had the opposite effect. In the course of this dissertation I will argue that the two interventions could not coexist: the ‘*Emergenza Nomadi*’ has to be rejected because it is baseless and detrimental to the Romani communities; the ‘National Strategy’, instead, should be carried out by an independent body, while shifting decision-making power to the Romani communities themselves.

This dissertation will provide a new perspective on the Romani issue by arguing that the ‘camp’ is not only a tool for institutional control and segregation, but also for resistance, as well as a huge business in which everyone plays their part. In this context the Romanies are both victims and agents. Both these statements are valid and one does not exclude the other. The experience of the Romani peoples in the city of Rome demonstrates a very complex set of
relationships in the ‘camps system’. Here different agents (local authorities, Third Sector organisations, and Romanies themselves) have been involved, to differing degrees, in reifying the marginalised position of this minority. Through in-depth analysis of this specific socio-political context I was able to observe the existence of a democratic deficit in the way these actors operate and co-operate with each other: competition and antagonisms, corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, and inefficiencies have all contributed over the years to producing and maintaining the present living situation of the Romani peoples.

**Significance of the research**

Italy today is characterised by an ‘excess’ of information about Romanies, most of it with a mere journalistic slant depicting them in negative and stereotypical terms. This material refers mainly to those who live in the ‘campi nomadi’, since little is known about the majority who have been defined as ‘invisible Romanies’ (Ricordy et al., 2012, p. 19). The government’s attentiveness to the Romanies’ plight is of recent provenance. Only in February 2011, in fact, was the first research by the Italian Parliament on the conditions of Romani communities in Italy published (Mercenaro, 2012a). To this day, not many scholarly works have appeared on Romani culture and history. The national narrative is still typified by ‘memory lapses’ (Boursier, 1999, p. 1), especially concerning the tragic events of the Second World War and Italy’s involvement and responsibilities in it. On an academic level, Romani studies still form a very marginal area of interest (Rossi, 2010). Besides, the history and memories of the Romani peoples are always narrated by Italian ‘experts’ and researchers rather than by the Romani themselves. It is thus not surprising that on this topic the Italian context is marked by widespread confusion.

This confusion is certainly deepened by the contest between those of opposing political alignments. Both left-wing and right-wing governments have supported the highly criticised ‘camps policy’. In this context, public administrations keep delegating Romani issues to Third Sector and/or Catholic organisations (according to which coalition is in power, either centre-left or centre-right) rather than to Romani agencies, while concealing the existence of special agreements and political patronage (Fazzi, 2011; Springhetti, 2009). This situation has affected not only the way non-Romani and Romani organisations relate to each other and to the authoritative agency, but to public opinion as well.

Politicians and media make free use of xenophobic rhetoric in addressing the ‘Romani problem’, often portrayed as a mere security issue. This keeps reviving old stereotypes, while also legitimising discriminatory, and even violent, actions against them. As a consequence, it
has not been possible yet to forge and execute a durable bipartisan policy that could overturn the current trend of ghettoising Romani peoples within institutional camps. The Italian Government recently adopted a ‘National Strategy’ regarding the social inclusion of these minority groups. Its commitment, though, was merely a response to the European Union’s request to improve the Romanies’ situation by addressing the causes of their marginalisation. On top of that, the whole project still looks vague, as recognised by a number of both Romani and non-Romani informants.

This initiative has emerged in the context of legislative and policy factors which thwarts any real change: the lack of a transparent and accountable apparatus that can monitor government proposals; patronage-ridden politics; absence of any comprehensive national legislation regarding dealing with Romani issues; failure to empower the Romanies (or, more to the point, a strategy of disempowerment); and their lack of self-representation (ventriloquism). This contradictory approach by the Government is harming Romani communities, whose situation has got worse, not better. The government’s and Third Sectos’s incapacity to solve this issue might also reflect the difficulty Romani communities face in cooperating with each other as well as their internal diversity.

Therefore the major contribution this research will make is to provide a clearer picture of the complex system (made up of the public sector, CSOs and Romani organisations) that surrounds Romani-related issues in Italy, highlighting the main causes of the minority’s social exclusion and marginalisation. The analysis will deliver a new theory about the predicament of Romanies living in Italy, while suggesting possible courses of interventions that could make existing policy initiatives more effective.

Terms and definitions

Romani peoples/Romanies/Roma

The Romani population comprises a multitude of groups and sub-groups scattered across all continents (Mancini, 2010-11). Since their first appearance in Europe, which can be dated circa the 10th century AD (Matras, 2004), these peoples have been generally identified by non-Romanies in derogatory terms (i.e. ‘Gypsies’, ‘Zingari’, ‘Zigeuner’, ‘Gitanos’, ‘Cigani’). These definitions are all ‘exonyms’, given to the Romanies by outsiders and dominant groups. Since 1971, after the First World Romani Congress was held in London in 1971, they agreed on the dissemination of the term ‘Roma’.

As Rövid (2011, p. 47) argues, though, it is only after the collapse of the communist block in 1989 that the term ‘Roma’ came to the fore. Particulalry in Europe, where they are
concentrated and constitute the largest ethnic minority, the terminology used to describe has varied considerably since 1969, the date of the first text relating to the Roma communities. This was clearly acknowledged by the CoE (2012a) in a recent report titled *Descriptive Glossary of terms relating to Roma issues*:


But while the use of term ‘Roma’ has experienced an exponential growth, it is not embraced universally by all Romani communities. According to Hancock (2010), the word ‘Rom’ originally meant ‘married Romani male’ but, after they arrived in Europe, it diverged in two directions. Some kept this meaning but confined it to themselves; for others, it came to denote only ‘husband’. Thus the Sinti (see next section), for example, or the Romanichals or the Manouches/Manush use the word only with this narrower meaning, not when referring to the broader group (p. xix).

The adjective ‘Romani’, instead, has a much wider ethnonymic application (Rövid, 2011 p. 48). In fact, Hancock (2010) argues, all Romani groups use it to describe themselves: ‘A Sinto or a Romanichal readily admit to being a Romani person, to speaking the Romani language and maintaining the Romani culture’ (p. xix). As a consequence, following Hancock, I will employ the term ‘Romani’ (plural Romanies) throughout my thesis, thus keeping the common practice of using adjectival forms as nouns (e.g. she is a Bulgarian, he is Hungarian).

Even though the above-mentioned terms are based upon mistaken assumptions and carry offensive meanings, they continue to be used, and the transition to the endonym ‘Roma(nies)’ has not yet been successful (Hancock, 2010, p. xviii). Except when I am directly quoting other authors’ speeches or opinions, citation of these exonyms will be accompanied by inverted commas.

Notably, ‘Romani’ was the product of elites that started to emerge in the 1950s within the Romani diaspora. For this reason it is an unfamiliar concept and one not universally accepted by Romani people. As Klímová-Alexander (2005) observed, ‘the homogeneous Romani identity is a political project rather than a reality’ (p. 13). It may be rare but there are also Romanies who proudly define themselves as ‘Zingari’, consciously appropriating a term imposed upon them (Bellucci, 2007; UNAR, 2011b).
‘Rom, Sinti, Camminanti’

‘Rom’ is an endonym commonly used as a cover term for all groups (Rom, Sinti, Kalé, Manouches/Manush, Romanichals, Camminanti, Jenisch) living in Italy (Mancini, 2010-2011; Marzoli, 2012; Vitale, 2010). Italy’s ‘Rom’ constitutes a specific category, divided into several sub-groups. These generally differentiate themselves from one another by profession, region of origin or residence, or religion (Marzoli, 2012). They arrived in Italy by sea from the Balkans and have settled predominantly in its central and southern regions (Sigona, 2007).

‘Sinto’ (plural ‘Sinti’) is another endonym. Presumably it stems from ‘Sindh’, a southern province of present-day Pakistan bisected by the Indus River (Bellucci, 2007; Cagol, 1995; Marzoli, 2012). This cluster of peoples constitutes probably the oldest Romani settlement in Italy. They arrived by land around the beginning of the 15th century. They live predominantly in central and northern regions, but in summer move south and to the islands for work reasons. Italy numbers at least ten groups of Sinti, who differ according to region of origin or speech dialect, which has largely replaced the Romani language (Special Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights [SCPPHR], 2011).

The ‘Camminanti’ (literally travellers) are a distinct group of Romani who settled principally in Sicily. To this day their origin remains a matter of debate (Sigona, 2007). According to Cellai (2003), ‘they consider themselves a nomadic or semi-nomadic group, but they refuse to be associated with the “Zingari”, although they do not deny the fact they may have become related by marriage to Sinti groups during their travels’ (para. 1). They are the least represented of peoples, being only a few hundred strong (Bellucci, 2007). The term which is used to describe this group probably derives from their nomadic lifestyle (Cagol, 1995; Cellai, 2003).

‘Nomadi’

The term ‘nomade’ (plural ‘nomadi’) is an exonym commonly used in Italy to define the Romani people, not only within mainstream discourses or media analysis but also in the context of institutional policy-making (Amnesty international, 2011). Nevertheless, according to recent publications issued by the Italian authorities—see, for instance, La Pubblicazione sulle Minoranze Senza Territorio (The Publication on Stateless Minorities; Ministero dell’Interno, 2006); the Rapporto Conclusivo dell’Indagine sulla Condizione di Rom, Sinti e Camminanti in Italia (Final report of the survey on the status of Roma, Sinti and Travellers in Italy; SCPPHR, 2011, p. 12); or the Strategia Nazionale d’Inclusione dei Rom, dei Sinti e dei Camminanti: Attuazione Comunicazione Commissione Europea no.173/2011 (National Strategy
for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Camminanti Communities: European Commission Communication no.173/2011; UNAR, 2012b, p. 78)—only 3 per cent of all the Romanies living in Italy maintain a ‘nomadic’ lifestyle (Riniolo & Marcaletti, 2013). Yet Italian Government policy is still based on the false stereotypical assumption that all Romanies are ‘nomads’. Vitale (2010) maintains that the term ‘nomad’ was introduced during the 1980s, mainly in an administrative context, as an all-encompassing and ‘politically correct’ definition for the collectivity of Romani groups residing in Italy (p. 1): it was an attempt to replace the highly derogatory ‘Zingaro’.

‘Campi Nomadi’

The modern ‘campi nomadi’ can be considered a direct derivation of temporary structures designed in the 1970s to respond to the supposed ‘cultural needs’ of Romani minority groups. Today they are officially designated by more ‘neutral’ concepts such as ‘Villaggi della Solidarietà’ (Solidarity Villages) or ‘villaggi attrezzati/autorizzati’ (equipped/authorised villages) and have been used by the Italian authorities in the most recent decades as a reference model for housing policies issued towards the Romani peoples (UNAR, 2012b, p. 78). Down the years, though, they came to resemble ‘permanent ghettos’ (Marzoli, 2012, p. 35).

Different types of camp can be observed in contemporary Italy. These can be roughly classified into three categories: 1. Illegal or unauthorised camps, basically spontaneous encampments similar to ‘the slums of many Third World cities [...] often without running water, toilets and electricity’ (Sigona, 2005, p. 748); 2. Legal or authorised camps, ‘tolerated’ by the local authorities but equally precarious and poor as those in the first category; and 3. Equipped or Solidarity Villages, which can be described as camp structures built by public institutions on ‘the military camp model, with residents allotted a numbered place with a caravan or, sometimes, a prefabricated container’ (Sigona, 2005, p. 748).

The latest versions of ‘campi nomadi’, which fall within the third category, are commonly fenced, equipped with video surveillance and patrolled by security officers at the entrance and inside the camp (Amnesty International, 2012b; Daniele, 2011a). Despite their institutional character, municipalities are often unable to ensure adequate living standards for the inhabitants. All three types of camp are located on the outskirts of cities, and they often

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3 Although these institutional documents try to quantify statistically the percentage of Romanies still adopting a ‘nomadic’ life style, they also note that this approach is adopted only by an insignificant portion of the total population (this is indeed odd, as the Italian government’s approach towards Romanies is premised on their definition as ‘nomads’).
lack basic security of tenure. It is not surprising that they are generally ‘built, or allowed to
exist, in areas close to prisons, dog pounds and rubbish dumps’ (Sigona, 2005, p. 748). To this
day, there is no national legislation regulating ‘campi nomadi’.

Integration/Inclusion:

At both European and national levels there is a clear tendency today to use the
concept of social ‘integration’ and ‘inclusion’ as if they were interchangeable. The two terms,
though, possess very specific histories and meanings and have undergone significant variations
in different national contexts.

With particular regard to the Italian context, the term ‘integration’ was introduced in
the late 1970s with the enactment of Law no. 517/77. This normative Act, dealing primarily
with education, aimed to end the segregation from mainstream society of people with
disabilities (Grossi, 2011). As for the concept of ‘inclusion’, this was adopted in the Italian
educational system only in recent times, mainly as a way of bringing legislation into alignment
with internationally accepted standards and terminology (Palmariggi, 2013). With this new
term, particular attention was to be given to the classroom as a whole.

In this dissertation I will refer to the way ‘integration’ and ‘inclusion’ have been
incorporated in the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. Here
both concepts assume a similar meaning and no distinction is made between them.

This communiqué (European Commission, 2011) marked a joint effort by European
institutions and EU member States to achieve by 2020 ‘the social inclusion and integration of
Roma via all instruments and policies for which they are responsible’ (European Union,
Committee of the Regions, 2012, p. 52). Already in 2008 an initiative with a similar aim, the
European Platform for Roma Inclusion, was launched during the first European Roma Summit
held in Brussels (European Commission, 2013). A year later, the Ten Common Basic Principles
on Roma Inclusion were adopted as a tool for both policy-makers and practitioners managing
programs and projects designed to support Roma inclusion (European Commission, 2009b). All
these actions represented an unprecedented effort to tackle prejudice, intolerance,
discrimination and social exclusion which affect the everyday lives of Europe’s largest ethnic
minority.

Within the EU strategy on Roma inclusion, member States were asked to develop
targeted measures in four crucial areas: education, employment, healthcare and housing
(European Commission, 2011, pp. 4-7).
These aims, as well as interpretations of the concepts of ‘integration’ and ‘inclusion’, were also adopted as key elements of the strategy launched in 2012 by the Italian Government (Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali, 2012b).

**Thesis overview**

The thesis is divided into three main sections. The first section provides an introduction and canvasses the methodological approach. Chapter I defines the field of research, the object of study and its focus and the significance of this dissertation. This part concludes with a synopsis of the thesis.

Chapter II outlines the methodological approach and fieldwork process (data collection and analysis). Here I also provide the impetus for conducting this project, the research design, selection of the methodology, the target group, the sampling strategy and limitations of this study.

The second section discusses the policy context. Chapter III traces the history of the Romani peoples’ ‘nomadisation’ and ‘campisation’. It gives first a short presentation on the current situation facing Romanies living in Italy. This chapter then presents the main stages of the strategy adopted by the Italian Government to deal with the presence of the Romani population. The government approach was essentially centred on the ‘camp’ as a tool for spatial control. This chapter also locates the legislative framework designed around the Romani peoples in the context of the international debate regarding the national and transnational questions of Romani identity.

Chapter IV focuses on the socio-political context of contemporary Italy, particularly in the last 20 years. Specifically, this chapter explores the ‘Nomad Emergency’ at both national and local levels, highlighting the existence of political continuity between left- and right-wing administrations. Here I also analyse the Italian Government’s reception of the proposal from the European Commission to prepare national strategies for the social and economic inclusion of the Romani people.

The third section reflects upon the ‘nomad camps’ in the city of Rome. It reveals a complex scenario, defined here as the ‘camps system’, in which different parties (local authorities, Third Sector organisations and Romanies themselves) are involved, with differing degrees of responsibility, in the constant production and reification of the emergency approach adopted by the government which presupposes and perpetuates the marginalised position of the minority groups. These two chapters draw heavily upon the analysis and interpretation of fieldwork material and were organised according to themes arising from
interviews. The voices of Romani people, CSO representatives, public servants, social workers and other key informants have been central to these two sections, forming the heart of this thesis.

Chapter V looks at the role played by Third Sector organisations in the management of the ‘camps’ and at their interaction with local administrations. I argue that competition and antagonisms, corruption, inefficiencies, and a lack of transparency and accountability, have contributed to the creation and consolidation of this complex system developed for the purposes of excluding the Romani peoples from Italian society.

Chapter VI provides a new perspective on the Romani issue by arguing that the ‘camp’ should be seen not only as a tool for institutional control and segregation, and an incubator of criminal activity, violence and poverty, but also as a factory whose products include self-ghettoisation, identity closure and resistance, the contestation of power and expression of agency.

In the Conclusion I emphasise the dissertation’s central contribution and outline the implications of my research for policy-makers.
CHAPTER II

Methodology

This study aims to analyse the situation of the Romani peoples in Italy. It concentrates in particular on the ‘campi nomadi’ and reflects on the causes of their marginalisation. The specific focus on the capital city was chosen because it is the hub of Italian politics, and Rome’s local affairs often assume national relevance, especially with regard to Romani-related issues. As Clough Marinaro and Daniele (2011) argue, the condition of Romanies living in Rome ‘holds the potential to directly affect future approaches to policy across Italy’ (p. 621). Rome is also where more Romanies reside than anywhere else in Italy. Focusing on the last 20 years allowed me as a researcher to analyse the politics and policies of both left- and right-wing local administrations. Thus the capital city functioned as a magnifying lens through which the social exclusion of Romani peoples and its relation with the national approach to cultural diversity could be investigated. Rome was also the socio-political context I had a better understanding of, because of experience as a ‘social worker’ among a few Romani communities living in camps. The fieldwork was conducted between November 2010 and August 2011.

Motivation for the research

In the last 20 years I have been working and volunteering for several national and international organisations in Italy, Great Britain, USA, Germany, Togo, Norway and Australia. I have dedicated a great part of my adult life to the plight of marginalised groups. My interest in Romani-related issues, in particular, came from a professional experience of mine with some of the largest Romani communities in Rome. From 2006 to 2008 I worked for the association Arci Solidarietà Lazio in the ‘villaggi attrezzati’ of Candoni and Castel Romano. My role was to monitor the schooling of Romani children, to mediate between their families and local institutions, and to develop and apply new intercultural tools.

This research was driven by the observation that the dominant views on Romani-related issues were mainly shaped by the proliferation of ‘dichotomous’ analyses. Government, media and mainstream Italian society stereotyped Romanies as ‘nomads’, ‘dirty’, ‘lazy’, ‘criminals’, and blamed them for their marginalised position. On the contrary, international advocacy organisations have criticised Italy’s public institutions, a view often

4 The term social worker is used generically to describe my role as involved in activities such as: assessing the social needs of individuals, families and groups; assisting and empowering people to develop and use the skills and resources needed to resolve social and other problems, and further human wellbeing and human rights, social justice and social development.
supported by influential Italian scholars, who portray Romanies as victims and the ‘campo nomade’ as an institution that objectifies its inhabitants. CSOs, mainly those working inside the camps, have also criticised the government, but over the years they have become powerless to stop its policies being implemented. Finally, Romani peoples and intellectuals-cum-activists generally blame the government and Third Sector organisations for exploiting and disempowering them.

This context was thus one dominated by conflicting stances. The guiding principle of my research strategy was not to undermine or deny the validity of anyone’s stance but to emphasise the fluidity, rather than theoretical rigidity, which characterised the Romani issue. This required separate analysis of each agent, the better to understand the reality of the camps.

Research design

This dissertation consists of two interlocking phases: background analysis and empirical research.

During the first phase the existing legislative and policy framework was mapped and analysed. This process is based mainly on different types of documentary research sources (McCulloch, 2004). They include policy reports, committee papers, published treatises, newspapers and magazines. The background analysis was essential for the preliminary collection of contextual information. This included: analysis of EU level policy alongside national and local legislation; identification of research already carried out by international organisations, various agencies, national and local associations; examination of social inclusion projects (focusing on employment, education, health and housing) carried out by the local administration and Third Sector organisations, particularly in the city of Rome; identification of the existing literature on interculturalism and the examination of Romani-oriented projects promoted by the city council and Third Sector organisations.

The second phase consisted of empirical research. Although fieldwork has been carried out using many of the classical tools that can be identified as ethnographic (such as the use of qualitative data, based on structured and semi-structured interviews, field notes, direct and participant observation of contexts), this did not lead to the production of classic ethnography as theorised by authors such as Malinowski (2002) or Geertz (2001). The object of this study was not specifically the Romani as a group or an ethnic community. My aim was not to take up full-time residence in a ‘campo nomade’ and study its population. Rather, I was interested in the metropolitan and national contexts as a whole, and in gaining a closer understanding of
the camps’ administrative machinery and relations among the actors operating in it. This involved consultation with experts, institutions and associations (both Romani and non-Romani) that dealt with Romani-related issues on the ground. By drawing upon Shore and Wright’s (1997) definition of ‘anthropology of policy’, I moved through “the field” […] as a social and political space articulated through relations of power and systems of governance’ (p. 11). Although this study aims to go beyond the conceptualisation of policies as constructing their subjects as mere objects of power, it acknowledges them as fundamentally ideological devices. By codifying social norms and values policies do also contain implicit (in the Romani case explicit) models of society. As instruments of governance they aim to organise people within systems of power and authority, empowering some while silencing others. Using what Reinhold (1994, as cited in Shore & Wright, 1997, p. 11) calls ‘studying through’, I will seek to conduct multi-site ethnographies by exploring policy connections between different organisational and everyday worlds.

Before beginning to collect data, I mapped the organisations (private and public, Romani and non-Romani, independent and social advocacy, local and national) as well as individuals (activists, academics, local politicians, journalists, schoolteachers, social workers) engaged in these issues. Participant observation was carried out in a number of Romani encampments: four ‘Villaggi della Solidarietà’ (Candoni, Castel Romano, Camping River and Cesare Lombroso); two ‘tolerated encampments’ (Tor de’ Cenci and Torraccio di San Basilio); and Metropoliz/Città Meticcia, an abandoned pork-meat factory occupied in 2009 by more than 200 people from different parts of the world, including Romanies, with the support of two non-profit organisations (Blocchi Precari Metropolitani and Popica Onlus). I collected information not only through repeated visits inside these encampments, but also on the outside, using methods that included email correspondence, phone conversations, participation at public conferences, official events, unofficial assemblies, cultural exhibitions, meeting informants in their households and attending private celebrations.

The project used a composite methodology to create a comprehensive picture of both the situation of Romani peoples living in the metropolitan target area and the challenges this group posed to service providers (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The research approach combined theoretical conceptual analysis, qualitative empirical and exploratory analysis, social documents analysis, quantitative data analysis and critical analysis of public policies. The data collection also relied on the contributions of sundry community-based and advocacy organisations. The roles of partner organisations included: the provision of support during the fieldwork to forge links with relevant communities; logistical guidance with regard to
meetings, conferences and interviews; provision of feedback on interim reports and other project materials; and assistance in exploring the project’s policy implications.

**Selection of the methodology: Qualitative approach**

While quantitative research makes broad use of quantitative variables – that is, numerically codified information and data implying the creation of statistical parameters – qualitative research assumes a non-numerical form: ‘Qualitative data are not necessarily or usually numerical, and therefore cannot be analysed by using statistics’ (Muijs, 2004). This information is collected through ethnographic methods, interviews, texts and interpretation (Fiorucci, 2011, p. 39). Several considerations determined the choice to adopt a qualitative approach.

First of all, this approach valued human subjectivity and experience, deeming it a valid source of knowledge. It basically gave the actors themselves a voice, allowing their decisions and actions to be explained first-hand. Secondly, the use of a method that depends on attentive listening helped establish deeper and more significant communication between researcher and informants. Third, greater interaction aided the attempt to understand phenomena through meanings assigned to them by the subjects involved (Thomas, 2010). Together with the goal of better understanding a certain situation, the qualitative approach emphasises the importance of getting the study’s subjects themselves thinking about, and reflecting on, their experiences. The use of ‘guided interviews’, for instance, promoted this process both individually and collectively. Employing this approach allowed me to formulate a number of set topics, while enabling specific questions to arise freely during these meetings. According to Mikkelsen (2005, as cited in Narayanasamy, 2009), the major strength of semi-structured interviews is that participatory methods contributes ‘to adjusting the interview to make it more conversational, while still controlled and structured’ (p. 293).

The adopted methodology mixed phenomenological enquiry with action research, also known as Participatory Action Research (PAR).

In the first case, my goal was always to seek an ‘insider’s account of the phenomenon under investigation and to develop an understanding of it along with the participants themselves (Guimond-Plourde, 2010). My objective was to hear the accounts of all the subjects involved in the ‘camps system’ and reason inductively from this foundation. When this research was conducted, no theory existed to describe the situation of Italy’s Romanies as produced by an entrenched mechanism created and reified by constant interactions between public institutions, non-profit organisations and members of the Romani communities as well.
The choice of a phenomenological approach was thus driven by the idea that it would have helped to recognise the complexity and plurality of the objects under investigation, while emphasising the unique way each actor experienced them.

In the second case, it was important to be constantly involved with the practices and processes they registered during the research phase. This explains the simultaneous adoption of a PAR methodology. Due to my past experiences as a social worker and political activist, I believed ‘action’ (yielding change or improvement) and ‘research’ (yielding knowledge and understanding) could be performed at the same time (Hess & Weigand, 2008, as cited in Rossi, 2010). In other words, on many occasions I stopped being a mere observer of the context analysed, and became an actor myself, a participant in pertinent social processes. This happened with Ti., for instance, a Romanian Romani living in the Candoni camp. I met him several times (in public, as well as in more private settings). In our conversations we reflected upon our life experiences, Romani/non-Romani issues, the camp and its conditions. I also tried to advocate his case when he was looking for a job (both in private and public job agencies), or discussing about his problems with CSOs’ representatives in charge of the camp management. In other occasions, for instance in the course of interviews with institutional agents or public meetings, I abandoned my role as a researcher and openly offered my opinions as a regular citizen arguing against the adoption of the ‘camps policy’ and in favour of giving voice to Romani individuals in order to find alternative housing solutions.

As argued by Rossi (2010) in her study on the Romani encampments in Rome, ‘action research’ is the best (and unavoidable, as she argues) methodology when dealing with some of the poorest and most marginalised people in Italian society. While tracing the history of this approach, which was first introduced by the social psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1946, Rossi provides also a significant overview of its application in the Italian context: Raniero Panzieri (1965), Danilo Dolci (1960, 1996), Danilo Montaldi (1961, 1970) and Gianni Bosio (1972) are among the most important ones (Rossi 2010, p. 60). Interviews and discussions were some of the tools they used to support the process of emancipation. At the core of this methodology, involvement is a key concept.

Since ‘human condition’ is a fundamental issue for social sciences, working together with the people directly involved in my research was thus chosen as the most appropriate approach. The fact that by adopting action research I had the possibility of focusing on generating solutions to practical problems, while empowering participants through ‘self-reflective cycles’ of planning, acting and observing, and reflecting (e.g. Kemmis & McTaggart 2005, 2014), are some of its major strengths. This approach does not have to be applied
necessarily in a linear way. It should rather be understood as a fluid, open and responsive process: different stages tend to overlap and initial plans can be reformulated in the light of learning from experience. The importance of this methodology is that it allows participants to develop and evolve ‘in their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the situations in which they practice’ (Kemmis & McTaggart 2005, p. 277). My interaction with informants, Romanies and non-Romanies indifferently, was thus guided by the principle of participate collaboratively to studying, reframing, and reconstructing social practices.

Despite the best intention, in the course of the fieldwork I slowly came to realise that as a researcher I occupied an ‘in-between position’: I was neither ‘insider’ nor ‘outsider’. As conceptualised by Breen (2007), I could not perceive my role as caught up in the simplistic insider/outsider dichotomy. Due to my previous experience as a social worker among Romanies living in camps I developed a certain sensitivity to the communities I was studying. Despite the advantages in terms of relational intimacy, understanding of the group’s culture, I was also aware that the effort of conceptualising myself as an ‘insider’ (co-learner/advocate), minimising the power differential between me and participants, could also lead to a loss of objectivity and, most importantly, to an ‘illusion of sameness’ (Pitman 2002, cited in Breen 2007, p. 164).

It was then good to remind myself that as non-Romani person and member of the ‘Gadje’ dominant society, I was considered as an ‘outsider’ by many of the people interviewed, particularly those who did not know me and were meeting me for the first time. As O’Leary (2012) argued, though, the experience of the boundaries between outsiders and insiders is negotiable and mutable over time. From my initial positioning looking from the outside in, boundaries became at times more blurred allowing the combination of the perspectives of ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’. This helped creating spaces for dialogue and reflection: in some occasions I felt and was identified as an insider, adopting the participants’ views, while in others my informants learned to view the world from the perspective of an outsider and to question some of their taken-for-granted assumptions. Consequently, being ‘in the middle’, as Breen (2007) theorised, can best describe my experience as a researcher. I was neither completely ‘inside’ nor completely ‘outside’ of the group that was being investigated.

**Target group, sample size and recruitment methods**

As previously stated, the present research focuses not only on selected Romani communities living in Rome, but also on official actors, Third Sector organisations and other privileged informants directly or indirectly involved in Romani issues, both nationally and
locally. The interviews were carried out using research templates specifically tailored to each of the identified groups and categories. Since I had been working with Romanies in the Italian capital from 2006 until 2008, and remained in touch with a number of them, I already had an extensive pre-existing network of contacts in the field. My choice, though, was not to approach those with whom I had an ongoing friendship or whom I had helped as a social worker.

With few exceptions, I approached individuals with whom I had no previous contact. My intention was to gather information spontaneously, thus avoiding possible contamination of the process owing to the existence of prior association. With those I already knew, informal conversations eventually proved more effective than ‘staged’ interviews. Initially, the Internet enabled me to identify Rome-based organisations – both Romani and non-Romani – together with all the institutional actors that had been dealing with this issue. I then sent them emails asking if they were interested in participating in my research project. At the same time I listed all the camps (spontaneous, tolerated and ‘equipped’) within the city limits. The camps’ residents and social workers were then visited a number of times.

All interviews during the fieldwork had the interviewees’ prior consent. Where informants preferred not to undergo a formal interview or be recorded, thus preventing a transcript from being produced, notes were taken during or soon after the conversations. All recorded interviews were fully or partly transcribed. By analysing the transcripts it was possible to observe that some topics predominated.

Thematic repetition guided me in choosing which themes to develop when elaborating the thesis. The process of theme identification was consistent with the phenomenological approach, which is an inductive research methodology, seeking to build theory from the information gathered, rather than to apply pre-existing theory to data sets (Curry, Nembhard & Bradley, 2009).

Despite the number of interviewees, the amount of data collected and the breadth of issues discussed, only the most relevant aspects were analysed in detail. These were the themes most often reiterated by participants that could provide a theoretical insight and a contribution to understanding Romani issues (Bryman, 2012). The selection of statements quoted in this PhD project was dictated by the profundity of the information contained in them and how well they clarified the topic under investigation. The most significant statements were given priority (Mason, 2010).

During the fieldwork phase I interviewed 82 informants. They can be classified in the following way:
• Twenty-six Romani individuals (of which six are representatives of Romani organisations). Twenty-two based in Rome: six Romanian Romanies (five from Candoni camp, one from Camping River); ten from the former Yugoslavia (one living in Cesare Lombroso camp, one who lived in the former Casilino 900, three from Gordiani camp and five now living in houses after a long period in camps); one Moldovan Romani (living in a house); five Italian Sinti (two living in the Torraccio di San Basilio camp and three from the Barbuta camp). Four based outside Rome: two Italian Romanies from the city of Pescara (both living in houses); one Italian Sinto living in Ravenna in a caravan; one Romanian Romani living in Romania.

• Fifteen Third Sector social workers or representatives of social organisations working inside the ‘campi nomadi’ in Rome. Three working with the Casa dei Diritti Sociali; one with Eureka I; six with the Croce Rossa Italiana (CRI); one with Ermes Coop Sociale; four with Arci Solidarietà’ Lazio.

• Two spokespersons for independent or advocacy organisations based in Rome: one working with Associazione 21 Luglio; one with Popica Onlus.

• Five spokespersons for Rome-based religious organisations: one working with the Comunita’ di S. Egidio; two with the Unione Nazionale per la Pastorale dei Rom e Sinti (UnPres); two with Caritas Roma – GrIS Area Zingari.

• Seventeen interviews with other organisations dealing with Romani-related issues: Eleven based in Rome: two working with Space Metropoliz; two with Cooperativa Zajedno; one each with Spirit Romanesk, Associazione Identitatea Romaneasca (Identita’ Romena), Interferenze Rom (Radio Popolare), Rete Scuole Migranti, Centro Zurla, Queens Servizi, Fondazione Museo della Shoah. Six based outside Rome: one working with the Istituto Storico della Storia della Resistenza e della Storia Contemporanea; one with Centro Servizi Volontariato; one with Fondazione Fossoli; one with the Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d’Italia; one with the Associazione ‘Aven Amentza’ – Unione Rom e Sinti Onlus; one with the Associazione Nazione Rom.

• Eight institutional actors, one each working with: Comune di Roma – Municipio XII Ufficio Cultura; Comune di Roma – Ufficio Nomadi; Comune di Roma – Dipartimento Servizi Educativi e Scolastici; Comune di Roma – U.O. Pari Opportunità; UNAR; the Camera dei Deputati (the national Parliament); the Ordine Regionale dei Giornalisti Abruzzo; MIUR.

• Six academics: Two from the Università degli Studi La Sapienza (one each working with Dipartimento di Politica Sociale e Sociologia Economica and Dipartimento di Sociologia delle Relazioni Etniche); four from the Università degli Studi Roma Tre (one each working
with the Dipartimento di Studi Urbani - Stalker ON, the Centro di Ricerca sull’Educazione Interculturale e la Formazione allo Sviluppo (CREIFOS); the Dipartimento Scienze dell’Educazione; the Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione).

- Three more key informants: An ethno-musicologist; a spokesperson for the Unione Italiana del Lavoro (UIL) – Area Immigrazione; a spokesman for the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL) – Area Immigrazione.

Most interviews were conducted individually, though on occasion others (for example, the interviewee’s friends or CSO activists) were present and at times participated. The identities of all interviewees, with the exception of those who agreed to reveal their names, have been withheld to protect their privacy and minimise the risk of repercussions. Participants chose the interview locations. At the outset I briefly outlined my research and the general themes of the interview, inviting prospective participants to ask any questions.

The key themes of my interview questions differed according to the subject interviewed. Romani people, for instance, were asked about family details; life memories; relations with their culture and community as well as with Italian culture and the host society; the settlement process; and any problems encountered therein. Interview themes for government and Third Sector representatives were: job description and role; type of approach and service provided; goals and expected outcomes; problematics; analysis and reporting on achievements.

On the occasions I participated in private group discussions, interview subjects were made aware that I was recording for a research project. At the end of those sessions the transcripts (either full or partial), together with personal comments, were relayed to the organiser, who in turn distributed them to all the participants. Only once did some people taking part in an informal meeting explicitly ask that their statements not be used. Despite these requests, these occasions offered an invaluable contribution to the research, because they permitted direct observation of how the Romani question was being handled.

Limitations of the research

During fieldwork a number of factors played a key role in hampering the collection of data and my relations with the informants. A summary of the main obstacles is now presented.
‘Fake’ Romani organisations

The 2000s were characterised by a veritable explosion of Romani organisations in Italy. It was impossible to quantify the exact number or define all their activities and purposes. A specific register for these organisations has never been compiled (U Velto, 2012c). As regards the city of Rome, it could be observed since the very beginning of the fieldwork that many Romani organisations identified during the exploratory stage were now defunct. Romani as well as non-Romani informants told me many of these organisations had been created as an expedient to get funds from the government. Although some information on these organisations could be garnered from the Internet (such as field of activity, contact details, the president’s name), it was not possible to reach the founders and find out more about their personal experiences. Thus I could not get any information on their previous projects, their goals with this one and their accomplishments.

Divisions among Romani communities and Third Sector organisations

A further obstacle I faced during fieldwork concerned serious divisions, not only among all the Romani communities in Rome but also among CSOs in the field. Each camp under investigation had a very specific history and problematics. The study, analysis and comprehension of the contexts encountered in the field was thus complicated by the fact that the same topic often generated multiple viewpoints. Each informant provided an invaluable perspective on the theme we discussed, but very often they would contradict those given by others. Each had a very personal approach to the events being analysed, and personal reasons for saying or not saying certain things. My role was not to force them to say what they did not want to say, but let them talk and put things the way they wanted to. I am thus aware that my research conclusions were not only influenced by my subjectivity and ability to ‘read between the lines’ but also by the relations I was able to build with the informants and the quality of the information I was able to glean from them.

The inability to contact ‘fully integrated’ Romanies

The decision to focus my research on the ‘camps system’ and the Romanies living in the ‘campi nomadi’ was not accidental: it was dictated by the following two observations. Firstly, it was difficult to be in touch with the ‘Italian/autochthonous Romanies’. With the exception of those publicly recognised as Romanies, mainly intellectuals or activists advocating for their rights, these groups generally did not live in camps and preferred to remain invisible. In fact, the predominant tendency was for fully integrated Romanies to ‘hide’ their cultural
background so as to avoid being stigmatised and marginalised. Secondly, I felt that analysing the Romanies living in camps, and gaining a better appreciation of how official policies affected the operation of the camps, could potentially reap results from which the Romani population, and the broader Italian society, would have benefited.

During my fieldwork I have been basically manoeuvring in a dual context: on the one hand facing the high ‘visibility’ of Romanies within the ‘camps system’; on the other, the ‘invisibility’ of those choosing to remain unnoticed. The prospect of ‘rehabilitating’ the Romani population in the eyes of mainstream society was thus complicated by two conflicting portrayals:

1. It was not only institutional actors who depicted the ‘stereotypical Gypsy’ to simplify a very complex cultural universe, but also camp-dwelling members of the minority group who at times exploited this caricature for their own personal interests. The stereotype was thus perpetuated by the government and Third Sector organisations via the ‘camps system’. But the Romanies’ ‘welfare dependency’ should also be understood as the result of a precise strategy of resistance to assimilation and of ‘collective-identity closure’ attained by the Romanies themselves;

2. Fully integrated Romanies generally preferred to use mimetic strategies and disguise themselves within the mainstream population, thus avoiding the risk of being confused with their ‘visible’ cousins.

My position as a researcher/outsider

From the outset I made clear to all my informants that I was conducting a research project financed by the Australian Government and that my aim was to improve understanding of the circumstances facing the Romani peoples in Italy, with a focus on the functioning of the ‘campi nomadi’. So I overtly defined my ‘neutrality’ in terms of not siding with any of the actors involved in this research. Nevertheless, it is not possible to be value neutral in conducting research in contested domains. During the fieldwork, I gradually developed the conviction that everyone bore some responsibility for creating and replicating the ‘camps system’ and for the marginalised position of the Romani peoples.

As a non-Romani researcher and member of the ‘dominant culture’, I recognised the limitations of my own perspective and position as well (O’Leary, 2004). Using Marotta’s (1997) interpretation of the ‘ethnic experience’ in social research, I built the relationship between myself (‘the self’) and the participant (Other), ‘respecting the informant as an autonomous individual whose voice is accepted on an equal basis’ (p. 51). Marotta argued that ‘rather than
using the “ethnic experience” as a means to an end, [...] the “ethnic voice” should be respected as a unique voice and an end in itself’ (p. 51). The adoption of an ‘ethical stance’ (being-for-the-Other) allowed me to value the uniqueness of the ‘Other’.

Nevertheless, one of the obstacles involved in data collection was also tied to my role as a researcher. Despite my declared ‘neutrality’, somehow my presence was often perceived as a ‘threat’, albeit with different degrees of intensity, by most of the people I interviewed (officialdom, Third Sector representatives and Romanies, equally):

- Public servants were either reluctant to be interviewed, or afraid of releasing information;
- CSO representatives whom I contacted (mainly those working in the camps) were sometimes quite defensive and showed a certain opposition, especially when their conduct was probed. Because of such resistance, I found access to their way of operating, resource management and evaluation procedures blocked;
- As for the Romanies in the camps, they were diffident towards strangers, or ‘Gadje’. When asking questions about a number of personal issues (their migratory story, job activity, relation with other Romani peoples, officialdom and Third Sector bodies, their principal problems and political involvement), I did not always get the impression they were responding openly. This was especially clear when other inhabitants of the camp were around. There was never a chance to hold private meetings inside the camps. The responses of the people interviewed were thus influenced by the fact that somebody else was listening to their statements or even controlling them. As a consequence, there was greater repetition of themes in the interviews with Romani camp-dwellers than with those living in a different setting. In fact the latter turned out to be the more insightful informants.

In conclusion, it is evident that a number of difficulties have been preventing me from accessing and obtaining relevant data, particularly with regard to Romani peoples. The result is that non-Romani perspectives are more dominant than Romani ones in parts of the thesis. It is thus important to make a distinction between perspectives on Romani camp dwellers and of Romani camp dwellers. This distinction is crucial, and yet it is thanks to their combination that a clearer picture of the hidden mechanism of the ‘camps system’ can emerge.
CHAPTER III

The institutional and spatial segregation of Romanies in Italy

This chapter provides an historical overview of the situation facing Romanies in contemporary Italy. It analyses the main issues that have been negatively affecting the settlement and inclusion of this minority group: the lack of cultural recognition as a historico-linguistic minority; the ‘nomadisation’ and ‘campisation’ strategy adopted by the government; absence of national legislation, leaving the legal status of a substantial portion of the population uncertain; and, finally, it frames the Romani issue in the context of the international debate regarding Romanies’ national and transnational identity. All these factors have contributed over the years to keeping them on the margins of mainstream Italian society. This chapter thus confirms the existence of a well-established tradition of spatial control and segregation of their communities.

A kaleidoscope of definitions

Romanies from Central and Eastern Europe have moved to and from Italy for centuries. The first settlements can be traced back to around the 14th century, part of migratory flows from south-eastern Europe during the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into the Balkan region (Bellucci, 2007; UNAR, 2011b). According to the most recent figures, between 130,000 and 180,000 Romani are living in Italy (SCPPHR, 2011): about half are Italian citizens, 20 to 25 per cent from European Union countries, mainly Romania, while the rest are either non-EU members or stateless since the dissolution of Yugoslavia (ERRC, OsservAzione, & Amalipé Romanò, 2010; Open Society Foundations & Open Society Justice Initiative, 2010).

Generally speaking, there are no precise data on Italy’s Romanies. One reason for this is that Romanies usually adopt mimesis to better assimilate to the rest of the population, thus reducing the risk of potential discrimination (SCPPHR, 2011). This attitude has generated a knowledge gap about Romanies. Another important reason for the imprecision of data on the Romani is that no country in Europe, except for Britain, gathers ethnic data. In Italy, a survey targeting the Romani minority was conducted only during the recent ‘state of emergency’, raising serious concern within the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 2012).

Romanies living in Italy can be divided into three major groups: Rom, who predominantly live in the centre and south of the country and are inclined to a sedentary life; Sinti, who are found mainly in the north and have maintained a nomadic lifestyle; and
Camminanti, the least populous and least represented group, located mostly in Sicily during winter and travelling throughout Italy during the warm months, when they work as organ-grinders, tinkers and repairers of household items (Ciani, 2011; Bellucci, 2007; Ministero dell’Interno, 2006). The way ‘nomadism’ is understood here derives from the perception that people who travel for work are nomadic. Although many other occupations might fall into the same category, or imply constant relocation from one place to another (i.e. sailors, soldiers, salesmen, professional athletes, musicians, seasonal workers, academics and politicians), these groups are not commonly identified as nomadic. This is a brief outline of the main activities carried out by the Sinti:

In the 1930s, and for a generation after that, the Sinti had a monopoly on the ‘spettacolo viaggiante’ (travelling show) in Rome, as well as around Italy: all circus performers or managers of travelling shows were Sinti. Since the 1950s the ‘galuppi’ (non-Sinti employed as assistants in the squares where the Sinti used to perform) have taken up show business themselves. This triggered strong competition among carnival workers, in contrast with the traditional solidarity among Sinti people. To this day, 70 per cent of carnivals and funfairs, and almost all circuses, small and ‘big tops’ alike, are still run by Sinti. (Converso, 2009, para. 7)

These three groups are commonly recognised as the longest-established Romani communities in Italy. Others have migrated there more recently, especially since the end of the Second World War:

Some groups arrived at the beginning of the 20th century from [what is now] former Yugoslavia (Rom Kalderasha, Rom Lovara, Rom Harvati) and by now they are all Italian citizens; others arrived over 40 years ago (Rom Khorakanè, Rom Khanji, Mrznarija, Busnjarja, Rudari); yet others came from the Balkans at the end of the war that devastated this region between 1991 and 2000 (Khorakanè, Rom Albanesi, ‘Sciftari’ and ‘Kossovari’); chronologically, the latest to settle in Italy are from Romania and Bulgaria. (Ciani, 2011, p. 12)

The Romani communities of Italy can be subdivided by their citizenship status as well as by period of immigration: 70,000 are citizens, from families that have been in Italy for more than 600 years and spread all over the national territory; 90,000, who came from the Balkans in the
1990s after Yugoslavia collapsed, are classified as ‘extra-comunitari’ (non-EU citizens) and live mainly in the north; while the arrivals from Romania and Bulgaria are EU citizens and predominantly live in the major metropolitan areas (Milan, Turin, Rome, Naples, Bologna, Bari, Genoa). To these groups one should also add the unknown number of ‘rom irregolari’ (illegal Romanies) (UNAR, 2011a, p. 26).

A further distinction can be made in describing the Romani presence in Italy. It is possible to distinguish ‘Rom e Sinti autoctoni’ (autochthonous or native groups) from ‘Rom e Sinti stranieri’ (immigrants or foreigners). Fiorucci (2010) refers to the first group as those who have been living in Italy for a long time. He cites the following groups: Rom Abruzzesi, Rom Campani, Camminanti Siciliani, Sinti Italiani and Rom Kalderasha (Italian residents since arriving from Slovenia at the end of the Second World War; p. 11). Fiorucci counts those who arrived after 1945 in the second category. The distinction Fiorucci draws is of relevance today. Over the years, especially after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Romanies in these categories came into conflict with each other. According to Fiorucci, most ‘Italian-Romanies’ obtained their residency in Rome and live in ‘case popolari’ (council houses), or on private properties and estates, generally in the suburbs. Allocation of council housing to Romanies took place only twice: first in the 1950s and then in the ‘80s.

A number of the Italian-Romanies I interviewed said it was thanks to these housing assistance projects that they could consider themselves fully integrated into mainstream society. The arrival, in subsequent stages, of Romani groups from elsewhere in Europe has often been perceived by ‘Italian-Romani’ communities as an intrusion and a threat. In the last two decades the presence of new ‘foreigner-communities’, and their criminalisation, affected public perceptions of the whole Romani population. Romanies who arrived from the Balkans in the 1980s and ‘90s, and those who left Romania at the time of EU enlargement in January 2007, have been accused of compromising the fine balance developed over the years between ‘Italian-Romanies’ and non-Romanies. At the same time, most of the economic resources were realigned towards these ‘alien’ groups, forgetting that concrete problems among the Italian-Romanies still needed tackling (Converso, 1996, as cited in Fiorucci, 2010).

This is not the only such rivalry within Italy’s Romani population. In fact, there is strong opposition among ‘foreigner-communities’ as well. Typically, the latest arrivals are being blamed: ‘Many Roma of non-Romanian origin believe that the latest influx of Roma from Romania has jeopardised their situation’ (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions [COHRE] et al., 2008, p. 12).
This minority can be described and classified in other ways besides these. ‘Italian-Romanies’, for instance, have also been labelled ‘rom invisibili’ (invisible Romanies). Those who belong to this group generally have Italian surnames, live in houses, have regular jobs and prefer to hide their cultural background. The ‘foreign Romanies’, instead, are typically addressed as ‘rom dei campi’ (Romanes of the camps), although a few Italian-Romanies, mainly Sinti, live there also (Ricordy et al., 2012). Paradoxically, the invisibility of Italian-Romanies is a direct consequence of the conspicuous visibility (albeit unwelcome) that those in the second category have attained in public discourse over recent decades.

Due to the complexity of the Romani population, the notion people have of them is still surrounded with mystery, fear and stereotypical misconceptions. The Italian Senate’s Human Rights Commission noted that ‘on the one hand, many Romani peoples with Italian citizenship are commonly considered immigrants. On the other, although many foreign Romanies were born in Italy they are still not recognised as Italian citizens’ (SCPPHR, 2011, p. 20).

A 2007 survey of a ‘mainstream’ population sample revealed that only one in 1000 had a complete knowledge of Italy’s Romani communities (Arrigoni & Vitale, 2008). Many do not even know that most of them are Italian citizens (Istituto per gli Studi sulla Pubblica Opinione, 2008) and think they should all be expelled (Kington, 2008), or subjected to such practices as fingerprinting and DNA profiling (AnalisiPolitica, 2008). The complexity of the Romani condition in Italy is reinforced by the heterogeneity of their legal status. In fact, as a UNAR report states,

‘When we talk about the Romani communities we refer to: Italian citizens; foreign citizens belonging to other EU member states; foreigners who are citizens of non-EU countries; foreigners granted asylum-seeker status or temporary protection; de facto stateless, born in Italy from de facto stateless parents’ (UNAR, 2011a).

Despite all the differences, Italian media and mainstream society have only recently begun using the term ‘Rom’ to refer to all the Romani communities living within the national borders. This is leading to their definition and classification as a homogeneous population. Many Romanies do not even define themselves as such (Bellucci, 2007). Open confrontation exists between Rom and Sinti groups.

Yet it is still very common to hear epithets such as ‘Zingaro’ (Gypsy) or ‘nomade’ (nomad), which also have the effect of generalising about a very diverse population. The Italian Ministero dell’Interno (2012), for instance, uses the term ‘Zingaro’ in an indiscriminate reference to all the Romanies living in Italy. On a section of its website dedicated to
‘Communities with no Territory’, the Ministero dell’Interno is equally indiscriminate in branding Rom, Sinti and Camminanti all ‘Zingari’. Here they are defined as ‘stateless communities’ that ‘are not settled within a delimited territory’ (para. 2). On the same page, the fact that they are no longer ‘nomads’ is also stressed. Despite this acknowledgement, subsections are dedicated to the ‘campi nomadi’. Constant use of the term ‘nomad’ perpetuates inaccurate and misleading information about the Romani communities, while corroborating the notion that all these people live in ‘campi nomadi’ because they are ‘stateless’ and ‘nomads’. According to a report by the ERRC (2000), ‘the Italian media use “nomad”, “Gypsy” and “Rom” interchangeably, but “nomad” generally appears in headlines’ (p. 11). ‘Nomad’ was considered a ‘catchier’ term in the news, said an Italian journalist interviewed by the ERRC. This remains a common tendency, as recently reported by Amnesty International (2011).

Lack of cultural recognition and cultural misinterpretation

The Romani presence on the Italian peninsula can be dated back to the 15th century. Since then, the ‘Zingaro’ has always been characterised as the outsider par excellence, forced to play the role of ‘guest’ and live out a condition of eternal ‘semi-clandestinità’ (semi-illegality) (Tomasone, 2012). Especially after the Risorgimento, the new unified Italian nation-state introduced policies specifically directed at controlling ‘vagabonds’ and, more broadly, ‘socially dangerous’ groups, such as the Romanies (Clough Marinaro, 2009). They became the main catalyst for all the fears harboured by the Italian elite for the purity of a putative national identity. As in other parts of Europe, in Italy the pinnacle of segregational practices against Romanies was reached early in the 1940s when they were interned in concentration camps such as Agnone, Arbe, Boiano, Cosenza, Gonars, Perdasdefogu and Prignano (Bravi, 2009; Bravi & Sigona, 2006).

According to a recent report by the SCPPHR (2011), notwithstanding the terrible price paid by this population, ‘there are not many historical data about the persecution of the Romani peoples in Italy during the Fascist regime, and it is thus not possible to clearly determine the dimension of this phenomenon’ (p. 36). Not until recently, as Clough Marinaro (2009) states, were the crimes against them committed by the Fascist regime during the Second World War disclosed. In past decades it was commonly believed that Fascism had ‘targeted them exclusively as a problem of public order and not as a racial issue, unlike the Nazi regime’ (p. 272). This assumption stemmed from a deep-seated belief in the legendary generosity of Italians. According to Favero (2010) this misconception, which originated during
the initial Italian colonial enterprises, has long been ‘functioning as an ideological laundry for reformulating and then setting aside disquieting moments of national shame’ (p. 138). The growth of nationalist sentiments is now playing a key role in entrenching a collective historical amnesia.

Although to this day there are no precise figures regarding the actual number of victims, it is safe to say between 500,000 and 1.5 million Romani individuals lost their lives during the Second World War (SCPPHR, 2011). In the Romani language this catastrophe is called the ‘Baro Porrajmos’, or ‘Great Devouring’ of human life, the Romani Holocaust (Hancock, 2009). Jews were similarly subjected to discrimination, oppression, racial hatred and violence for centuries until their dramatic events of their extermination under the Third Reich, when ‘between 1941 and 1945, five to six million Jews were systematically murdered’ (Jones, 2011, p. 233). Although both these peoples experienced huge losses during the Second World War, the Final Solution is mostly remembered today as the Holocaust of the Jewish people, while little space is generally dedicated to understanding the Porrajmos and the genocide of the other victims.

Despite its alliance with Nazi Germany during the Second World War and its consistent contribution to the diffusion of Nazi-Fascist rule across Europe, Italy has not yet officially recognised its responsibility for the Holocaust of the Romanies (Boursier, 1999). Therefore, the Italian Government has not found itself able to offer reparations to those incarcerated in Italian concentration camps or transferred to German-run extermination camps (Bravi, 2006). Commemoration of the Holocaust was established with the passing of Law no. 211/2000 which enshrines January 27 as the ‘Giorno della Memoria’ (Remembrance Day) (Parlamento Italiano, 2000). This Act does not mention the mass extermination of the Romani peoples or any other minority targeted by the Nazi-Fascist ‘Racial Laws’.

It contains a solitary reference to the Jewish people, the Italian politicians and soldiers that were deported to the Nazi camps. Only recently have a few official documents specifically mentioned the Porrajmos, the need to promote knowledge of it, commemorate it through meaningful initiatives and amend Italian legislation to extend official recognition to the historicity of the ‘Great Devouring’.

Although burgeoning interest in Romani history may indicate a change in interest, the drafted amendments fail to recognise the Holocaust’s other victims as well. ‘Porrajmos’ is still a word not many people know. This is a clear sign that the memory of the Romanies has not found a place in Italian history (Bravi, 2006). For decades public institutions did nothing to promote better understanding of Romani culture and the suffering of these people. This
tragedy was visited on Romanies throughout Europe, leading to a problematic relationship with the State, which is often perceived as a potential threat to their culture (Cemlyn, 1995, 2000a). Current history textbooks, for instance, still focus on the Jewish Holocaust, and are therefore incomplete as they do not provide any tool for reconstructing the genocide of the Romani peoples and the reasons used by Nazi-Fascist regimes to justify it (Baldini, Baldoni, D’Isola, Frassanito & Sullam, 2003, p. 7).

Nomadism has now almost disappeared in Europe. Rothéa (2003, as cited in Testino, 2009) notes that ‘90 per cent of Romani peoples are sedentary, and in some countries there are still semi-nomadic groups who move periodically. But this is mainly due to family, religion or work-related issues’ (p. 5). And yet, ‘the Roma still have a reputation as nomadic people; but the nomadic lifestyle owed as much to Roma people being banned from entering towns as to any desire to wander’ (Krushelnyck, 2004, p. 1).

This situation is still quite evident in contemporary Italy, where certain cities enact restrictive ordinances against Romanies to prevent their stay or seasonal activities. Bravi and Sigona (2006) argue that the approach of the Italian authorities is responsible for pushing some of the Romani communities into adopting a nomadic lifestyle. They use the category of ‘nomadismo forzato’ (forced nomadism) to describe it.

The major consequence for categorising the Romanies as ‘nomads’ is that they do not make it on to the list of non-native populations officially recognised by the Italian Government. Recognition of these minorities was restated by Law no. 482 of December 15, 1999, entitled Provisions Concerning the Protection of Historico-Linguistic Minorities. This new Act had the merit of recognising, enhancing and protecting the language and culture of 12 minorities living on the peninsula: Albanians, Catalans, Germans, Greeks, Slovenes, Croats, as well as the speakers of French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan and Sardinian.

The adoption of Law 482/1999 actually reinforced the exclusion of Romanies. The main reason for exempting Romani communities from the mandate of this legislation was that the Italian Government considered them ‘not settled in a given territory’ (Ministero dell’Interno, 2009c, p. 4): in other words, they were still seen as ‘non-sedentary and nomads’ (Fiorucci, 2010, p. 32).

The law established that recognition must be premised on four criteria. According to The Publication on Stateless Minorities issued by the Ministero degli Interni in 2006, the Romani minority meets only three of these: the State acknowledged that ‘Rom, Sinti and Camminanti’ had been living in Italy for the last 600 years (historical criterion), that they were defined as a specific ethnic group (ethnic criterion) and that they had their own language,
Romanes (linguistic criterion), but they did not fulfil the fourth criterion: the link with a specific territory. The fact that the Romani communities were considered ‘distributed throughout the entire territory’ (Ministero dell’Interno, 2009c, p. 20) precluded them from accessing legal protection. Exclusion of the Romani peoples was addressed merely as a bureaucratic and political issue rather than a linguistic and cultural one. Paradoxically, as argued by Spinelli (2012), Romanes is spoken by more people in Italy than some ‘protected languages’.

The ‘camps strategy’

*From protection to segregation*

In a work published in 2000 by the ERRC, Italy was iconically defined as ‘Campland’, the only country in Europe promoting a policy of segregating its Roma population inside ‘ghetto-like urban camps’ (Clough Marinaro, 2009, p. 265). More than a decade later, the housing of Romani peoples in camps remains the pivotal measure used by the Italian Government to ensure the social ‘inclusion’ of this minority group. As Clough Marinaro and Sigona (2011) argued, the camps are the most visible expression of Roma’s social exclusion and are consequently the primary focus both of popular anti-Gypsism and institutional repression and control. While many camps are being demolished because of dire living conditions, others are being built by the same authorities to continue warehousing an ethnic group for which few alternative policy approaches are devised. (p. 587)

The institutional policy of using camps to suit a supposedly ‘nomadic lifestyle’ has been defined by UNAR (2011b) as a completely ‘made in Italy’ solution. This particular approach places Italy in a unique position within the European context.

According to Piasere (2004, as cited in SCPPHR, 2011), the ‘politics of the camps’ can be dated back to the mid-20th century, corresponding with the arrival of Romani peoples from the then Yugoslavia. Piasere explains that this government policy was not unrolled as the result of a specific national choice, but could rather be described as ‘a local policy which, from the northern [Italian] cities, developed and contaminated the rest of the country’. From the 1980s, though, this approach gained support and funding from a number of ‘Regioni’ (p. 49). It is because of this political process, ranging from local experiments to national policy, that Italy has slowly turned into a ‘paese dei campi’ or ‘Campland’. In other words, what could be

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5 The Italian state is administratively subdivided into twenty Regions, each characterised by a local regional administration endowed with some legislative powers.
initially described as a generic ‘consuetudine’ (custom) later became a political practice sanctioned by law. The institution of the ‘campo nomade’ as we know it today finds its very origins in the ‘Leggi Regionali’ (Regional Laws) issued during the 1980s. The idea of the Romani peoples as ‘nomadic’, and the creation of camps as an institutional measure to ‘protect’ this alleged ‘cultural trait’, were the main features of these laws (Fiorucci, 2010). Enactment of these laws was significant for two reasons. One, it represented a belated attempt to respond to the Romani presence in Italy, an embryonic mechanism for regulating the discriminatory episodes affecting them. Two, it reinforced stereotypical ideas, laying the foundation for the association between Romanies and camps.

On this point, a social worker operating inside one of the ‘campi nomadi’ was adamant:

In the Italian mainstream mentality the ‘Zingari’ (Gypsies) were always considered nomads. Before the Second World War, though, only a proportion of them were still nomadic or semi-nomadic. These people in particular were devoted to the ‘spettacolo viaggiante’ (travelling exhibitions and performances), horse-trading, metal handicrafts and were defined as ‘girovaghi’ (itinerants/vagrants) by mainstream society. After war’s end, a process of settlement took place, and economic boom times, till the first influx of Romani peoples from Yugoslavia took place. When the Italian Government issued the Regional Laws, it was with the earlier nomadic or semi-nomadic Romanies in mind. The government was trying to solve a problem, such as the need for housing policy, but was thinking about a reality that had been changing. Those laws were thus not able to deal with the situation as it evolved and to respond properly to it. Those people were no longer nomads. Yet, institutions continue to implement, in the best case, the ‘camps’ solution. (as cited in Fiorucci, 2010, p. 35)

Indeed, although only a fraction of the Romani peoples live in camps today – about 40,000 folk, between one-quarter and one-fifth of the entire population of this minority (SCPPHR, 2011) – the ‘Rom/nomade/Zingaro’ that policymakers have in mind is an abstract person created around the use of stereotypical images’ (Sigona, 2007, as cited in Fiorucci, 2010, p. 35).

According to Bravi and Sigona (2006), the very first form of recognition and protection of the ‘right to live nomadically’ harks back to October 1973, when the Ministero dell’Interno issued ‘Circolare’ (internal memorandum) MIAC no. 17/73. This document was directed at Italy’s mayors, especially those from the northern regions, who had started to enforce ‘divieti
di sosta’ (no-parking zones) against Romani groups. The Sinti were the sub-group particularly affected by these repressive measures, since their usual activities implied frequent relocation throughout the country. Although this Act required local administrations to abolish discriminatory bans and allow Romani peoples the right to a temporary stay in their communities (Maggian, 2011), it also had repercussions. Firstly, it started to contextualise these people in terms of a ‘Problema Nomadi’ (Ministero dell’Interno, 2006). Secondly, the recommendations contained in the MIAC no. 17/73 were also sowing the seeds of a future ‘camps strategy’. In fact it led to the creation of special campsites, which had to be equipped with all modern conveniences (Ministero dell’Interno, 2006; Sigona, 2002). The principles advanced in 1973 were reinforced in 1985 with the issuing of a new ‘Circolare’ (MIAC no. 15185/85). On this occasion, the inappropriateness of forced evictions of Romani peoples being carried out by local administrations was again highlighted (Ministero dell’Interno, 2006).

Nevertheless, as argued by Sigona (2002), the ‘expulsion policy’ adopted by many Italian local authorities even in the 1970s had forced part of the Romani population to be constantly on the move. This repressive approach was thus responsible for rotating the ‘Romani problem’, exporting it from one urban area to the next. This had also strengthened prejudices and fixed ideas about the Romanies as ‘nomadic’ (Bontempelli, 2006). With the introduction of these new legislative measures, Romani peoples were given a chance to settle temporarily in specific areas. This opportunity was sanctioned despite the fact that art. 16 of the Italian Constitution already recognized freedom of movement (‘Every citizen has the right to reside and travel freely in any part of the country’: Senato della Repubblica, 1947, p. 8). The characteristics of these early types of encampment already resembled today’s ‘campi nomadi’. They were delimited areas located on the urban fringe in accordance with ‘piani regolatori comunali’ (urban planning regulations) governing their location, size and settlement standards (Nessun luogo è lontano, 2008). On top of that, the regulations were quite rigid, subjecting inhabitants of these embryonic camps to a range of restrictions. For instance, school attendance for children was compulsory, and truancy could result in the child’s family being evicted from the camp; police had standing instructions to enforce special controls over the camp areas; and residents had to carry identity papers at all times (Sigona, 2002).

According to Piasere (1985), all government interventions since the 1970s concerning the education, social life, health or employment of Romanies were predicated on the existence of the ‘camp’. Initially established as a means of affording this minority ‘cultural protection’, the camps gradually evolved into an official instrument of segregation and control.
The ‘Leggi Regionali’ constituted a belated attempt to recognise and protect Romani language and culture. Different regions were slowly trying to fill what was a national legislative gap. This amounted to a clean break with the past, ‘when the “Zingari” were merely considered as a security and hygiene challenge, unworthy of protection’ (Sigona, 2002, p. 70). Nevertheless, the different degrees of autonomy granted by the national Government to the various regions created discrepancies and inequities in the enactment and enforcement of laws over the years. For instance, ‘Piedmont region has 3585 campi sosta, Sicily has 1053 of them and Basilicata only five’ (Nessun luogo è lontano, 2008, p. 7). In other cases, the regional laws only became effective long after their introduction. In Rome a 1985 regional law was enforced only 10 years afterwards (Clough Marinaro, 2009, p. 273).

At the same time, the terms used by each region in reference its Romani population were quite varied: “Nomad minorities” in Emilia Romagna, “gypsies” and “nomads” in Liguria, “Rom” in Veneto, Lazio and Friuli Venezia Giulia, “Rom” and “Sinti” in Tuscany, traditionally “nomads” and “semi-nomads” in Lombardy, “gypsies” in Trent (Sigona, 2002, p. 72). Some laws were more progressive than others: Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, for instance, focused on housing issues (Sigona, 2002). It is clear that public authorities did not stand aloof. As Bonetti argues (2012), political recognition of this ethnic group has always been incomplete and piecemeal: if, on the one hand, the government did not grasp this community’s growing diversity, on the other hand the authorities’ responses did not meet specific needs with a uniform legislative framework. Not surprisingly, to this day a comprehensive national law has not been enacted (assuming there is a compelling case for one). Besides, after all these years the practice of enforcing ‘no-parking zones’ exclusively targeting the Romani population persists in several urban areas (Sucar Drom, 2008).

The camp as a ‘civilising site’

In the 1970s the implementation of a new government approach was spurred by a progressive impetus: it was based on the view that this way would best meet the needs of a ‘non-sedentary, nomadic population’. Over the years, though, this political shift led to exclusion of the Romani peoples from active citizenship and all the rights attached to it (among others housing, schooling, employment and health care). Thus the camp evolved from an initial tenuous notion of ‘campo sosta’ to a more permanent concept of ‘villaggio attrezzato’ (equipped village). Still, the rootlessness attached to ‘nomade’, a term used in Italian political discourse on the false assumption that all Romani peoples are stateless and itinerant (Ciani, 2011; UNAR 2011a), constitutes the main justification for the temporary character of this type
of intervention. In the era when the Italian Government started regulating Romani policy, Opera Nomadi – a non-profit organisation established in the 1960s and one of the first to work at integrating the Romani – played an important role in combating discrimination and prejudice.

But Opera Nomadi’s efforts also had a downside. While advocating for Romani rights, it was also responsible for the spread of a certain perception that Romanies were exponents of nomadism. The organisation’s self-denomination is telling: Opera Nomadi literally means ‘activity (work) for nomads’. With that idea in mind from its earliest days, and its support of the first ‘aree di sosta’ designated for Romani caravans, Opera Nomadi helped normalise a kind of official intervention, and a rigid, narrowly defined understanding of what Romani culture was (Bravi & Sigona, 2006; Sigona, 2002).

Ironically, Opera Nomadi was proactive in rejecting negative stereotypes attached to Romani communities, yet its own view of them, consistently iterated, was static and stereotyped. For instance, when in 1965 Opera Nomadi pushed for the introduction of ‘special schooling’ for Romani children living in camps, it laid the foundation for differential treatment and a two-tiered pedagogical system. At the same time, this initiative carried overtones of ‘charity’, centred as it was on the premise that these camps were to be a temporary solution.

This schools system, also known as ‘Lacio Drom’, was the fruit of mediation by Opera Nomadi between public authorities and Romani communities (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2011c). The launch of this measure marked the first time systematic schooling had been introduced for a minority not previously involved in the Italian educational system (Fondazione ISMU, 2011). According to Bravi and Sigona (2006), the main idea behind this new government intervention was not merely to give Romanies the benefits of an Italian education, but to sponsor their ‘re-education’.

Together with their children, adults had to be imbued with a civic spirit aimed at forging a mutually positive society (Sigona, 2002). In those years, the educational gap between mainstream Italians and Romanies was commonly explained as a result of adhering to their own culture. Rituals related to gender roles, treatment of the dead, funerals and religion were all considered to play a crucial role in inhibiting their social development. As a consequence, so it was thought, they had to be re-educated through a process of cultural change effected within their own communities. The ‘aree di sosta’ became instrumental towards this end (Azzolini, 1971, as cited in Bravi & Sigona, 2006).

The educational project for Romani children was fundamentally driven by a sort of ‘religious or civilising mission’. In some cases, teaching staff looked upon Romani children as if
they were primitive and savage. This attitude, Sigona argued (2002), was reinforced by the Catholic and missionary roots of Opera Nomadi volunteers. At the same time, the creation of a separate schooling system was a way of keeping Romani students out of Italian schools (Bellucci, 2007). Only in 1982 was ‘special schooling’ at last abolished, but then a supplementary teacher was introduced. This conveyed the impression that Romanies were afflicted with some kind of ‘abnormality’ compared with their Italian peers, and needed to be the objects of specific intervention. Despite the official suppression of separate schooling for Romanies, some principles have revived the practice (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2011c).

Nowadays Opera Nomadi’s long-established policy, as well as its controversial and often ill-defined relationship with the State bureaucracy, are regularly criticised by several Romani activists and intellectuals.

In Santino Spinelli’s opinion, for instance, Opera Nomadi should be held responsible for the proliferation of nomad camps in Italy. For many years this organisation convinced both mainstream society and public institutions that Roma and Sinti are nomads [...] so they need nomad camps to be built for them. These spheres of activity cost the Italian society a lot of money, and Romani peoples became victims of this vulgar charity network. (Associazione Thèm Romanó, 2010, para. 3)

Kazim Cizmic, president of the Unirsi Association (International and National Union of Roma and Sinti), is another who has accused Opera Nomadi of making money out of Romani peoples (Gruppo Intercultura CdB S. Paolo, 2011). According to research conducted by Monica Rossi (2010),

for a long time it had been the only organisation to benefit from the funds for schooling of Roma children until the year 2000, when the arrival of other associations such as ARCI, CDS and Ermes - Comunità Capodarco replaced it, winning all the Municipality bids concerning Roma schooling projects. (p. 228)

Opera Nomadi basically enjoyed an undisputed monopoly over Romani issues for many years. Only recently, due partly to internal divisions and partly to growing competition, it was coaxed into sharing the ‘business’ of the Romani peoples with other organisations.

A negative opinion of Opera Nomadi and its president, Massimo Converso, also emerged from my interviews with the representatives of different ‘pro-Romani’ organisations
in the city of Rome during 2012. Condemnation of the organisation’s ultra-conservative approach and its past political choices appeared unanimous.

Today, Opera Nomadi as a national body no longer exists. The central headquarters, directed by Converso in Rome recently collapsed. Only branch offices in major cities have survived and continue to act independently (Bagnoli, 2010). Yet State agencies still give preference to reports prepared by Opera Nomadi rather than by independent organisations or well-known academics. For instance, two of the major publications issued by the government in recent years – The Publication on Stateless Minorities issued in 2006 by the Ministero dell’Interno; and the Final report of the survey on the status of Roma, Sinti and Travellers in Italy published in 2011 – rely extensively on Opera Nomadi’s knowledge of Romani-related issues. Besides, despite the widespread criticism mentioned earlier, a three-year agreement was signed between the MIUR and Opera Nomadi in 2009, covering the education of Romani children and the fight to bring down school dropout rates (MIUR, 2009).

No social housing for Romanies
Casilino 900: From Italian ‘baraccati’ to Romani ‘camp dwellers’

This section presents a case study of Casilino 900, a Romani camp in the suburb of Casilino on the south-eastern outskirts of the national capital – where former ‘baraccati’ (shanty-dwellers) live.

Camp Casilino 900 (see also, below, sections 4.2.3, 6.3.2.2, and 6.5.5) is not only a good example of the product of bipartisan strategy towards the Romani communities, but also a forgotten relic of the nation’s and city’s historical memory.

The problem of Rome’s ‘baraccati’ has a long history (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2010). Immediately after the end of the Second World War, agglomerations of shanty dwellings spread throughout the capital city territory. They were concentrated along the Tiber, near parks and industrial zones, and provided shelter for all those who had lost their homes during the bombing of Rome in 1943 and 1944 or been displaced by other acts of war.

Casilino 900 was one of the areas occupied for decades by Italian refugees. Later on, during the economic boom of the 1960s, Rome also became the destination of immigrants from the south of Italy in quest of job opportunities and better living conditions. Many became ‘squatters’ in the abandoned shacks of citizens who had either received council houses or found more permanent housing (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2010). In the 1980s, groups from Naples, Sicily and Calabria were occupying these same shacks. As often as
not, their neighbours would be Romani immigrants, who had been settling in the capital region since the late 1960s (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2011a).

During the 1970s and 1980s a massive program of council-house construction undertaken by local administrations gave Italian citizens the opportunity to move into new accommodation. In 1981 the first council houses were granted to ‘Rom Napulengre’ (Neapolitan Romanies) and ‘Rom Abruzzesi’ (Abruzzi Romanies) from the shanty town in the inner suburb of Mandrione (Converso, 2009). Since then, due to a lack of public investment, living in shacks or other makeshift shelter became a solution adopted mainly by foreign immigrants, not only Romanies (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2010).

Casilino 900 was inhabited until the end of the 1980s only by Romani residents. These had been migrating to Rome at different stages and most hailed from Yugoslavia. For a brief period in 2000 and 2001, the camp was home to 160 Moroccan immigrants. On February 18, 2001, a fire destroyed the area where they were located (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2011a).

The real emergency: Housing

When it comes to protecting and promoting their basic rights such as the provision of adequate living conditions, Romani peoples are commonly regarded as ‘second-class citizens’. The preference for official Romani camps rather than council houses remains the principal strategy. This emerges, for example, in the following utterance by Rome’s Deputy Mayor Sveva Belviso: ‘There is no valid alternative to the camps. It is not possible to fast-track the granting of council houses to Romani peoples. That would be to discriminate against Italians registered on the waiting lists’ (as cited in Cucinotta, 2012). So, Italian individuals retain priority for the allocation of tenement buildings. This remains the case in light of the fact that in Italy, and particularly in Rome, ‘housing is the real emergency’, as the Prefect of Rome, Giuseppe Pecoraro, recently declared (Zema, 2012).

In 2007 some 600,000 families across the Italian territory were under threat of eviction (Noi Consumatori, 2007). As for the city of Rome, according to a recent study, about 40,000 people are registered on a waiting list for public housing; 250,000 legal immigrants have housing problems; and 50,000 illegal immigrants are homeless (Picone, 2008). Amnesty International (2012b) recently concluded: ‘Social housing in Italy is scarce’ (p. 14). The sector is constantly shrinking, although the number of people in need of housing is actually rising (Riccardo & Gruis, 2007). Italy occupies one of the worst positions in Europe in terms of public-housing stock. Such stock accounts for about 4 per cent of all real estate in Italy, a low ratio
compared with its 30 per cent share in the Scandinavian countries or its 17 per cent share in France (Agostini, Bucalossi, Orefice, Palladini & Pietrangeli, 2011, p. 14).

The fact that these council houses are allocated according to discriminatory criteria makes it almost impossible for Romani individuals to access them. A ‘points system’ assigns a higher score to the most vulnerable families. Two big hurdles face Romani applicants, though: firstly, to be registered they must prove they have been evicted from private accommodation and, secondly, to be assessed they must show they have the right of residency. On the first

point, Amnesty International (2012b) notes how

Roma who have always lived in camps will never be able to prove eviction from private accommodation, no matter how many forced evictions they may have endured, even though they are among the most in need of social housing. Camps are not regarded as private accommodation and eviction from camps does not follow the same safeguards as eviction from private accommodation. (p. 14)

As for the second point, Amnesty International notes that in order to register residency, an address is needed, with street name and house number. Romani families most in need of social housing often live in informal settlements with no street number ‘ (p. 14). In other words, not only does Italian public opinion oppose the creation of an official camp or a ‘parking zone’ for Romani people: the idea of giving them council houses has the potential to provoke public unrest (Sigona, 2002). In turn, public pressure influences the way policymakers develop their political strategy (Bontempelli, 2006).

Today there is only one regional law in Lazio region regarding Romani peoples: L.R. no. 82/85, enacted on May 24, 1985. Its two major weak points are these: the law makes constant use of the term ‘nomad’; but makes no mention of the Sinti, Camminanti Siciliani or Romanies from Yugoslavia who had been residing in Italy, in particular Rome, since the 1960s (Fiorucci, 2010). The dearth of council houses and inadequacy of the legislative framework designed to regulate this issue are significant impediments to a comprehensive policy of social inclusion.

The legislative framework on Romani issues
‘Legal limbo’

Ghettoisation of the Romanies in authorised camps not only leads to their ‘physical segregation from Italian society’ but to ‘their political, economic and cultural isolation as well’ (OsservAzione, 2006, p. 8). In a report released in March 2012 the CERD raised great concern
over the fact that Italy continued to put Romanies ‘in camps outside populated areas that are isolated and without access to health care and other basic facilities’ (p. 4). Its concluding remarks urged the Italian Government to desist from practising segregation, and instead encouraged it to find alternative housing solutions (CERD, 2012, p. 4). According to a 2008 survey conducted by the CRI, 67 per cent of the Romani living in ‘campi nomadi’ in Rome are from the former – and now non-existent – Yugoslavia (Pulzetti, 2010). Unsurprisingly, 72.6 per cent of the Romanies in these camps are jobless (SCPPHR, 2011). In fact, one of the main issues many Romanies face in Italy is that they find themselves in a sort of ‘legal limbo’, denied the chance to participate fully in social and political life. Dire living conditions in the camps, often defined as ‘non luogo’ (‘no man’s land’), immediately conjure up another type of limbo, or ‘Kalisferia’, which in Romanes means ‘a place between Earth and Heaven’. This term was used by Ronald Lee (2002), a Canadian Romani, upon entering Camp Casilino 900 in Rome for the first time. The legal status of ‘apolidia’ (statelessness) that characterises most camp-dwelling Romanies today constitutes a formidable obstacle within a network of interventions undertaken by bureaucrats or Third Sector organisations. This obstacle has never allowed them to become self-sufficient.

Uncertain legal status is a fundamental issue bearing on the right to participate in the civil and political life of the State without being discriminated against (Crepaldi & Boccagni, 2009). This uncertainty is tantamount to ‘indirect discrimination’ by the Italian Government, which has never shown any determination to narrow the existing legislative gap between Romanies and Italians as a whole, thus minimising the prospect of equal treatment for Romani individuals. This administrative barrier clearly falls within the remit of Article 2 of the European Council’s Racial Equality Directive 2000/43/EC, which defines indirect discrimination:

Indirect discrimination shall be taken to occur where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would put persons of a racial or ethnic origin at a particular disadvantage compared with other persons, unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary. (Council of the European Union, 2000, p. 3)

This situation can be also explained using the analysis by Clough Marinaro (2009) of Foucault’s (1990) concept of ‘biopolitics’. As Clough Marinaro pointed out, it is possible to notice in the Italian context the emergence of a new form of controlling internal ‘enemies’, in this case the Romanies – a feat achieved by taking charge of their lives (Foucault, 1990; Clough Marinaro,
By applying administrative techniques the Italian Government aims to control the existence of Romani individuals, thus factoring racism into the power equation (Cemlyn, 2000a). In turn, this allows the government to avoid the use of physical violence in defence of society (Clough Marinaro, 2009).

As Sigona and Monasta have observed (2006), the lack of personal documents and residency permits, a key priority for ‘foreign Romanies’, becomes a political tool that can be used to threaten individuals with expulsion. One of the main consequences of this ‘biopolitics’ is that today a vital part of the Romani population, mainly those living in official or unofficial camps, is virtually forced into succumbing to ‘welfare dependency’, which leaves the principal causes of their marginalisation untouched, and forces them to survive on their wits (in casual and occasional employment, if they can get it; in the worst cases, crime if they cannot).

A report produced by the ERRC in 2000 portrayed this as the outcome of a policy that aimed to ‘infantilise’ Romani individuals (p. 12). The strongly criticised policy of housing Romanies in authorised camps, with their poor education and resultant high illiteracy rates – together with an indefinite legal status, consequent unemployability and the denial of access to social security and the health-care system – keeps Romani communities on the margins of society and excludes them from public and political life.

Like ‘stranieri in patria’

To this day the main ‘legal reference points for statelessness are the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness’ (Lynch, 2005, p. 3). Italy is among the 80 signatories to the 1954 convention, which was ratified and entered into force under the title Law 1962/306. It is not yet party to the 1961 convention, however (Perin & Bonetti, 2009). According to the first convention, which provides general recognition to the condition of statelessness, a stateless person is defined as ‘a person who is not considered a national by any State under the operation of its law’ (OHCHR, 1954, art. 1). The second convention, instead was introduced with the goal ‘to avoid statelessness and resolve conflicts concerning nationality’ (Parra, 2011, p. 1674). Out of 193 United Nations (UN) members, only 54 states – Italy not among them – have acceded to it (Bloom, 2013).

As stated in the Explanatory Report of the European Convention on Nationality, signed but not ratified by the Italian Government, ‘only “de jure stateless persons” are covered and not “de facto stateless persons”’ (CoE, 1997, art. 4). The 1961 Convention ‘recommends that

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6 Correct as of 8 November 2013.
persons who are *de facto* stateless should as far as possible be treated as *de jure*, to enable them to acquire an effective nationality’ (Lynch, 2005, p. 7). Ratification of this resolution would have provided stronger protection for those who, for various reasons, do not fall into the *de jure* category.

The existence of these two types of statelessness, with two very different protection regimes, is a complex issue with significant political implications. This condition today affects most of the Romanies who arrived in Italy in the 1990s after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. These individuals, together with their children – both those who were born on Italian territory and those who were not – are still deemed ‘*de facto* stateless’. That generally they have no valid identity documents makes it impossible for them to become ‘*de jure* stateless’. To lodge an application, a certificate of residency and a permit of stay are required (UNAR, 2011a). As observed by David (2008):

> There is a catch-22 situation in Italy: The Interior Ministry requires a residency permit to recognise people as stateless. And a residency permit cannot be obtained without a valid passport, which stateless people do not have. The Interior Ministry declined to comment. The only alternative is to sue the ministry in a civil court, which can take at least three years. (paras 18 & 19)

It is a paradox that leaves today’s Romanies very much ‘in between’.

Despite the fact they were either born in Italy or have been living there for decades, that ‘they speak Italian, eat Italian and cheer for Italy’s football stars’ (David, 2008, para. 1), these individuals are not officially Italians.

As recently stated in an appeal submitted by a group of Romanies to the President of the Italian Republic, Romanies feel treated like ‘*stranieri in patria*’ (aliens in their homeland) (Mercenaro, 2012b). Besides, the lack of a legally defined position is generally understood to be one of the main reasons for their being considered ‘nomads’ or, in the worst cases, ‘*intrusi e stranieri*’ (intruders and aliens) who should be removed (UNAR, 2012a, p. 14). According to Marco Brazzoduro,

> not even to women who gave birth in Italy is the possibility granted to get a ‘*permesso di soggiorno per gravidanza/maternità*’ (maternity visa), although this a right regulated by
The only document they get is the one they receive when they are released from jail, which is without a picture. (Personal communication, July 11, 2012)

The lack of national legislation regarding the Romani issue

Comprehensive national legislation on Romani issues has been lacking in Italy for 60 years (Bonetti, 2012). At the moment, the existing body of laws originates from the Regioni, and this has led over the years to great normative differences. On top of this, the legislative framework focuses on recognising ‘nomadism’ as a characteristic cultural trait (Zincone, 2001). As stated by Olga Marotti (2010), a lawyer and expert with the UNAR, during a round-table conference entitled ‘Towards an Italian law for the recognition and protection of the Roma and Sinti minorities?’, drafting a ‘national law on nomadism’ with the ‘popolo nomade’ (nomadic population) as its specific object of intervention is still considered a low priority by legislators. The existence of a gap in the national legislative framework makes it impossible to define unambiguously the status of individuals belonging to this ethnic group and this triggers a series of operational and bureaucratic reflexes that, so far, have prevented the Romani communities from taking an active part in any process of social inclusion. This has further reinforced the vicious circle of poverty, exclusion and discrimination whereby disadvantage in one area can lead to disadvantage in another.

As stated by the Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights Morten Kjaerum (2012), exclusion from education leads to exclusion from employment, which leads to increased poverty, which forces people to live in poor or segregated housing which, in turn, affects their educational and employment opportunities, as well as their health. And the vicious circle starts again and again. (para. 9)

The rule of law and an efficient legal system are crucial to removing social barriers and empowering the Romani communities. But, in contrast to the provisions already contained in the Constitution or to EU and international norms, the Italian legal system does not yet contain

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7 According to the article 19 paragraph 2 section d) of the Consolidated Immigration Law, a woman who does not have yet a regular residence permit and is expecting a child cannot be expelled and has the right to request a residence permit ‘for medical treatment’ from the moment that her pregnancy is certified until the 6th month of her child’s life (Comune di Milano, 2007).
specific protection measures for this minority, nor has it developed a comprehensive inclusion policy and anti-discriminatory mechanisms for their protection (ASGI, 2010; Galati, 2007).

Only in 2010, for the very first time, was a conference held in the Italian Republic entitled *The Legal Status of Roma and Sinti in Italy* (ASGI, 2010). The first-fruit of this international conference was the publication of a book that amounted to a unique work in this field. It was actually the first legal text in the republic’s 65-year history that extensively examined the condition of Italy’s Romani minority (Bonetti, 2012).

It may be quite illuminating to give an account here of renowned Italian jurist Paolo Bonetti’s keynote speech:

Why has it not been possible to conquer this challenge yet? Because those who tried before did not have a global vision. They were operating in only a limited way, thus leaving the same old problems behind. For instance, even if Law 482/1999 were modified by specifying the Rom and Sinti in its early passages, this would not change anything. In fact, this law applies only to minorities who can be specifically linked to a territory. Instead, an *ad hoc* law is required for the Romanies. This would not be to discriminate in their favour but to protect their cultural specificity. Certainly the enactment of a national law by itself is not enough. It is necessary to modify a number of other national laws as well. The National Roma Integration Strategy is inadequate […] The Regional Laws have failed: not only are they unequally disseminated, but they were not always implemented. The State of Emergency has failed. […] It is therefore essential to have a long-term, specific law to protect this minority group. And it must be binding on all local authorities. […] It is unthinkable that there are still people [in Italy] with no identity papers. Being ‘*de facto* stateless’ is a nonsense: it annuls the legal guarantee that is in the Constitution. These issues are so far-reaching that in the end nobody wants to study them. Then things get out of hand, culminating in an explosive situation, and then we need to implement an ‘Emergency’ measure. […] This conference was sponsored by the European Council and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Many experts in the field have participated. Why did they want to be there together with their teams of translators? Because, outside of Italy, the circumstances in our nation are very unclear. They ask, ‘Why can’t you change these things?’ And we reply, ‘Because they are incredibly complicated.’ ‘So why do not you solve them?’ ‘Because there is no political will.’ ‘And why not?’ ‘Because the extraordinary measures we have been taking never worked out.’ Complexity must be
worked through from within, rather than using a bulldozer. Besides, the problem does not belong exclusively to the politics of the present. We need to look beyond today because coalitions change over time and problems remain unsolved. We today are no experts on these problems ourselves. Or maybe we just wish to believe the situation is confined to the Roma and Sinti communities, those living in camps. But there are many others – leading clinicians and householders among them – who also have the right to protect their cultural identity, as clearly stated in Article 6 of the Constitution. The outlook for them is like that of the Jews in pre-Hitler Germany, when they had to hide their cultural identity, else they would have been immediately marginalised. [...] In Italy we have successful Romani businessmen, footballers in the national team, who are forced to deny themselves, because the moment they reveal their cultural affiliation they will be condemned, ghettoised and stigmatised.

Between national citizenship and transnational identity
Towards a transnational identity: The creation of a ‘Romani Nation’

The Romanies’ legal position and their quest for nationhood is complicated by the fact that since the 1970s a global Romani activism has consistently promoted the idea of international unity among Romani communities from various countries. Although emancipatory stirrings were noticeable in Eastern European countries in the late 19th century, most of these activities were carried out merely on a national level and very often they ‘failed due to internal rivalries and contested claims of leadership’ (Council of Europe Romani Projekt, [ca. 2005], p. 1). Affirming and consolidating a trans-border ethnic affiliation emerged as one way of recognising a hybrid and diasporic identity (Feys, 1997; Marushiakova & Popov, 2005). Already in the late 1950s, the Roma World Committee (CMG), founded by Ionel Rotaru in France, played an important role in the process of global self-organisation. Dissolved by the French Government in 1965, the CMG evolved into the Comité International Tsigane (CIT), representing the most advanced attempt to create a trans-border network of Romani communities (Council of Europe Romani Projekt, [ca. 2005]). CIT created offices in different countries, collaborated with foreign organisations and used modern strategies such as public relations, media campaigns, demonstrations and lobbying to press governments and societies on improving conditions for their Romani minorities.

Especially during the 1960s a number of Romani ‘umbrella’ organisations were created with the aim of engaging ‘the interest of the world’s Roma through UN discourse, instruments and structures’ (Klimová-Alexander, 2005, p. 16). Following the example set by Jewish
communities, whose demands at the end of the Second World War led to the creation of Israel and brought tens of billions of dollars in Holocaust reparations (Jones, 2011; Vago, 2001), ‘the main goal of the early organisations was to establish a Romani state with the help of the UN […], or alternatively at least to win recognised international status for Roma with the issuing of international Romani passports’ (Klimová-Alexander, 2005, p. 16). A Romani elite emerged in both Eastern and Western Europe, although with certain significant differences given their differing social and political conditions. Growing awareness of their own history, culture and identity led to organisation of the First World Romani Congress, held in London in 1971 (Marushiakova & Popov, 2005). This event marked an important change in the approach of Romani organisations to politics and society, from conflict avoidance and escaping adversity to an active stance and an explicit effort to control their destiny (Council of Europe Romani Projekt, [ca. 2005]).

A flag, an anthem (Djelem Djelem), a motto (Opre Roma!) and an international day (April 8) were adopted at the end of the congress as part of a new political movement based on the dream of a ‘Romani Nation’. In 1977 the launching of ‘the first permanent global Romani organisation’ (Klimová-Alexander, 2005, p. 16), the International Romani Union (IRU), followed by the Second World Romani Congress in 1978, bolstered moves towards emancipation and internationalisation of the Romani cause. The ambitious project of creating a Romani State soon disappeared officially from the political agenda, though within the Romani movement this aspiration was never abandoned (Klimová-Alexander, 2005). During the 1980s, recognition of the Romani genocide and the demand for reparations became the principal objectives of global Romani activism (Klimová-Alexander, 2005). This led to some successes – for example, in 1982 came West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt’s official acknowledgement of the grim fate of Romani peoples at the hands of the Nazis.

The Romani movement and the consolidation of the European framework

The collapse of communist regimes in 1989 and founding of the European Union in 1993, passage of the Maastricht Treaty and successive enlargements have all been crucial events that assisted the trend to Romani emancipation. The 1990s were characterised by increasing Romani participation in national politics, especially in Eastern Europe, and acquisition of national-minority status in several countries (Council of Europe Romani Projekt, [ca 2005]). During this period, in light of the political unrest in other parts of the Continent, the European Union promoted a human rights agenda. Within this context, the plight of the biggest and most marginalised ethnic minority of all became one of the EU’s major
preoccupations and, symbolically, a marker of its changing identity. For instance, during its Eastern enlargement, the EU made a candidate nation’s solemn commitment to improving conditions for the Romanies within its borders one of the preconditions for joining the EU (Rövid, 2011). At the same time, growing attention to Romani issues, at both national and international levels, sparked a boom in non-Romani CSOs concerned with human rights. These have carried out a number of lobbying activities in the name of Romani peoples. Their efforts, though, have been repeatedly questioned, leading to accusations that they have a professional interest in sustaining a ‘Gypsy industry’ (Council of Europe Romani Projekt, [ca 2005], p. 6).

The consolidation of the European Union had a significant impact on the Romani movement. Power struggles led to the emergence of new Romani actors and also tugged the movement in two divergent directions. During the 1980s, the co-ordination of activities carried out by a number of Romani civil rights movements based in Europe led to creation of the Roma National Congress (RNC), a new umbrella body comprising these organisations (RNC, 2008). In the early 1990s, the idea of providing Romani communities with ‘a body that would help them express their concerns at the European level’ also emerged. This was officially launched in 2004 as the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), with support from the CoE (ERTF, 2010, para. 1). While the IRU conceived of the UN system as the main target of its global activism – in 2003 it became the only Romani organisation accorded formal access to the peak global body – the RNC and ERTF concentrated their lobbying activities at the European level (Klímová-Alexander, 2005).

This growing duality within the Romani movement challenged IRU’s ‘monopoly on representing the “Roma of the world”’ (Rövid, 2011, p. 65). Around the time of the Fourth World Romani Congress in 1990, a significant shift was taking place, mainly due to disintegration of the socialist bloc. Until then, although the greatest part of the Romani population was concentrated in Central and Eastern Europe, initiatives for emancipation had centred on Western Europe. But the problems faced by these two Europes were quite different.

The emergence of new conflicting challenges

While in the West human rights, cultural and educational issues were the main focus, in the East a new elite of Romani activists seeking political representation emerged (Marushiakova & Popov, 2005). Cultural and social heterogeneity, together with political and personal ambitions, produced tensions among the Romani communities, leading in turn to competition for the right of representation (Council of Europe Romani Projekt, [ca 2005]).
shift from West to East is evident in new positions adopted by the IRU during the 1990 congress: that the Romanies are simultaneously citizens of the countries they live in, and entitled to a specific place in a future united Europe (Rövid, 2011). According to Rövid (2011), ‘the first part of this concept was determined by the relatively higher degree of social integration of the Gypsies in Central and Eastern Europe, while the second part is a response to the trends for future development of these countries’ (p. 66).

A number of, often conflicting, discourses were thus running in parallel: recognition and self-representation as a national minority; acknowledgement as an ethnic group within Greater Europe; and the idea of a diasporic ‘Gypsy nation’ with a mythical Indian homeland (Romestan; Toninato, 2009). Despite the changing emphasis put on each of these goals over the years and their divergent rationales, they have all coexisted among the aspirations of the Romani elites.

Of course, as noted by Goodwin (2004), globalisation played a big role in shaping political changes, leaving a degree of uncertainty in the way Romani claims would be voiced. The fact that ‘a plurality of sites of governance has emerged, at the local, regional, national and global levels, and the way in which we are governed is being incrementally transformed’ (para. 1) can explain the increase in identity-based groups claiming political recognition. For instance, the drafting and launching by the IRU of a Declaration of Nation during the Fifth World Romani Congress in 2000 should be interpreted as the by-product of an enlarged EU’s failure to solve the problems of Central and Eastern European Romanies (Rövid, 2011). On that occasion, the IRU officially articulated the concept of Romanies as a ‘transnational, non-territorial nation unified by a common Indian origin’ (Toninato, 2009, p. 9). Although in most of those countries Romanies were accorded the status of national minority, this had not produced any considerable progress for them. A new strategy was needed (Marushiakova & Popov, 2005). As Ian Hancock (1997) put it, ‘when Europe is divided into nation-states, and national minorities in other countries have governments to speak in their defence, then being identified with an actual homeland brings legitimacy and a measure of security’ (Quest for Compromise, para. 4). But, the Declaration hastened to add, emphasising an ‘Indian connection’ – a symbolic proclamation of being a worldwide community in the name of a transnational unity, did not amount to a rejection of ‘European identity’. Hancock (2010) later emphasised this point, arguing for the quintessential ‘Europeanness’ of the Romani peoples.

Despite a belated effort to depict Romani identity as essentially ambivalent, this view was not broadly accepted. According to Mirga and Gheorghe (1997),
some Romani intellectuals and leaders recall the Roma’s Indian origin and heritage as a basis for their political status and identity, while others eagerly affirm their European roots and heritage, and consider their Indian past as irrelevant to the current Romani causes and claims. (The Romani Transnational Minority, para. 5)

The latter position led to conceptualisation of the Romani as a ‘European minority’ and was incorporated in the Brussels Declaration of 1996 (Mirga & Gheorghe, 1997), reflecting ‘both their nature as a truly transnational minority and their importance to the process of European integration’ (Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale, 2008, p. viii). Several ways of viewing this minority can thus be identified, namely: ‘a Romani nation in diaspora, a Romani transnationality, a Romani non-territorial European minority, or even a Romani non-territorial state’ (Mirga & Gheorghe, 1997, Some Conclusions, para. 10). Romani culture and society as a complex, multi-layered reality inevitably caused some ambiguity when the various factions start to formulate their own vision of unity. They also cause some reservation on the part of international organisations and governments when they are faced with competing claims from the different Romani groups, each demanding exclusive rights to represent the Romani communities. (para. 1)

Prevalence of the local dimension over the international one

The IRU’s Declaration of Nation exhibits an international vision reinforcing a degree of uniformity in the political demands and claims of Romani communities around the world. As outlined by Rövid (2011), this manifesto contained three main interrelated statements: the Romani demanded international recognition as members of a stateless nation; they were promoting a new model of self-determination as a valid alternative to the traditional nation-state; and a cosmopolitan order was to be built as a guarantee of a truly global democracy. In other words, the non-territorial nation sponsored by the IRU provided ‘an interesting test case for re-conceptualising international law and participation in the international legal system’ (Goodwin, 2004). Although this vision has increasingly been embraced in many countries by prominent scholars, activists and policymakers, Romani campaigners sustained a national focus. As stated by Mirga and Gheorghe (1997),

usually the social problems of the Roma are considered part of the internal affairs of a given state, and therefore there is no need to make them a subject of the activities of
international Romani organisations other than to lobby governments to apply existing standards of social rights to the Roma. Although the international dimension is still needed, then, most of the work must be carried out at the national/local level. (Some Conclusions, para. 4)

The national dimension gradually surpassed the international one. This shift was due to the existence of peculiarly local issues but also to the difficulty of promoting unity. On top of this, the functioning of Romani umbrella organisations was increasingly questioned in terms of both democratic legitimacy and transnational leadership (Rövid, 2011).

The push for international recognition led by different Romani bodies had been frustrated by the failure of national governments to create appropriate institutions, policies and mechanisms guaranteeing the ‘effective’ political participation of Romani minority groups (McGarry, 2010). As noted by McGarry and Agarin (2012), Romani groups should play a more active role in improving the quality of their contribution, if only in response to the inadequate mechanisms developed by the State they lived in; yet governments should ensure Romanies ‘feel empowered, that their participation is meaningful, and that their voice matters’ (p. 3).

In Italy, the preconditions for such a discourse are still absent and the preponderance of national issues undermines the prospects for any global aspirations: the Romani peoples are not recognised as a national minority, but rather as a security issue; the government has neither officially nor unofficially acknowledged past persecutions under the Fascists, nor has it acknowledged the Porrajmos; Romanies are branded ‘nomads’ (Piergigli, 2011); the ‘National Strategy’ developed to bring about social inclusion lacked Romani expertise and experience, and was actually regarded as disempowering. Inevitably, the Romani organisations operating in Italy focused on these issues rather than the global scene.

Final observations

This chapter offered a brief historical contextualisation of the problems faced by the Romani communities in modern Italy. Firstly, it illustrated their cultural and social heterogeneity. Over the years, the complexity of the Romani population has given rise to tensions and rivalries among different groups. This has clearly affected prospects for unity based on common goals (see Chapter VI, below).

Secondly, analysis of how the Romanies have fared in Italy clearly pointed out the existence of a well-established tendency to adopt stances favouring public discrimination against this minority. Persecution of the Romanies during the Second World War, and
attempts to commit genocide against them, have not been officially recognised by the Italian Government. The tone is predominantly one of disquieting moments of national shame and historical revisionism. Conceiving of the Romanies as ‘nomads’ remains the guiding principle adopted by public authorities when exploring avenues for ‘social inclusion’. Because of their supposed rootlessness, Romanies are not yet officially recognised as a historical cultural minority, which in turn has precluded them from celebrating their cultural diversity. Most important, this categorisation led to the recent adoption of extraordinary measures to deal with the Romani issue under the ‘Nomad Emergency’ (see next chapter).

Thirdly, this chapter has retraced the history of the policy of building camps, replete with an ethnically based form of segregation. To this day, this constitutes the Italian Government’s most relied-upon tool in securing the ‘inclusion’ of Romanies. Alternatives to the ‘camps policy’ include replacing ethnic politics with inclusive programs directed at ‘the disadvantaged’ and converting abandoned urban spaces into new permanent housing. Romani and non-Romani organisations alike have promoted these ideas, but they are routinely dismissed (see Chapter V, below).

Fourthly, the legislative framework on Romani issues was also examined. The isolation of Romanies from Italian society flows not only from a lack of cultural recognition, but rather from strategic misinterpretation, and the spread of ghettoisation within official camps.

The fact that comprehensive national legislation regarding the legal status of ‘apolidia’ (statelessness) is still in abeyance loosens the legal toehold many ‘Romanies of the camps’ feel they have attained. Many of them are, in truth, ‘de facto stateless’, a condition that prevents them enjoying full participation in the civil and political life of the State, free of any fear they will become targets of discrimination.

Finally, the question of Romani citizenship is placed within the broader international debate on their identity. The ‘in-between’ sensation that touches a large proportion of the Romani population in today’s Italy is the product not only of national policies but of internal complexities and rifts.

Kymlicka’s studies on minority rights can be useful here in reflecting further on conditions as they affect the Romani peoples. According to Kymlicka (1995, 2001, as cited in Testino, 2009) the modern multinational and multi-ethnic states have to deal with two types of group or minority rights: first, there are national minorities and indigenous populations that claim self-government rights and autonomy; then there are immigrants or ethnic groups trying to negotiate their rights to settle within the host society and to find the best way to integrate themselves.
Kymlicka maintains that the Romani peoples fall within what he calls the ‘grey zone’: they do not share the same national territory, they are citizens of different nations and are dispersed all over the world (p. 39). In the Italian context they are striving for recognition as a national minority. At the same time, other Romanies are pushing for transnational status through the virtual creation of a Romani nation (either India as their ancestral homeland, or somewhere in their centuries-old European ‘home’).

All these options somehow clash with one another and incite not only internal divisions and rivalries but also confusion in the ways mainstream society perceives the Romani population and policymakers address their issues. Romani peoples do not have a State, in a bureaucratic sense, with the power to be the architects of an official, agreed national narrative. Today, this is frustrating any prospect for real unity and representative democracy, not to mention international recognition.

In 1991 Nicolae Gheorghe was one of the most passionate champions of the Romanies perceived as a ‘trans[border]-national minority’ (Gheorghe & Acton, 2001). Two decades later his view shifted towards the adoption of a new national paradigm governing the way the Romani issue should be construed (Gheorghe, 2010). He argued that what was required of policymakers was not a single, top-down, centralised strategy, but rather ‘appropriate processes and working methodologies to be designed at the local level, with full inclusion of local Roma groups, community organisers, local civic associations and local authorities’ (p. 2).

Gheorghe’s position is not widely accepted within the Romani movement, a fact he acknowledges:

there are different school of thoughts within the Romani movement itself. Some activists maintain the idea that Romani peoples are a people with no homeland, a stateless population. In this case a specific European pact is required, granting these Romanies a ‘special status’. This would entitle them to move freely or to settle if they decide to do so. This option is talked up as compensation for the genocide suffered by the Romani peoples during the Second World War. The Jews ended up with Israel; the Romanies got nothing. This international statute should be approved and recognised as a binding treaty. The standing of this school of thought has diminished over the years. [...]

I belong to the current of thinking according to which the public and political identity of the Romani peoples is based on ‘citizenship’: we are citizens of France, Romania or Italy; we want to be full citizens, without being discriminated against, and we want to be granted the opportunity to promote our language, our culture, our political awareness.
This interpretation is the exact opposite of those who claim that Romanies are stateless people. [...] All this reflects an internal struggle between factions inside the Romani political movement (Personal communication, July 21, 2012).
CHAPTER IV

The ‘State of Emergency’ and the ‘National Strategy’

This chapter is dedicated to an analysis of the Romani issue in Italy’s contemporary politics. It consists of two parts. The first explores the implementation of the ‘Emergenza Nomadi’ (‘Nomad Emergency’) at both national and local levels. The second explores the Italian Government’s reception of the European Commission’s proposal to implement national integration strategies for the social and economic inclusion of Romani peoples by 2020. This chapter outlines the ways in which the two initiatives collided and, most important, how they failed to improve the lives of Romanies despite pledges by the authors of each to do so. It opens with a historical overview of the Italian context, in which I will argue that the ‘Emergency’ intervention in the lives of the Romani population was not due to an unforeseen crisis demanding urgent action, as the ‘emergency’ concept might imply.

A well-established trend of government authoritarian approaches

Over the last 150 years it is possible to identify a few important features which played a key role in shaping government policies on cultural diversity, as well as the Italian national identity. These can be roughly subdivided into three main categories:

1. A governmental propensity for authoritarian approaches (Carter, 2010; Gallego, 1999; Mammone, 2006; Roberts, 2010; Ventresca, 2006a, 2006b);
2. A prevalent monocultural national narrative influenced particularly by Vatican interference in politics (Allievi, 2010; Müller, 2008; Pollard, 2005; Sitter, 2000);
3. A racist political culture, that remains unacknowledged and under-researched (Re, 2010), and internalisation of the myth that Italians are ‘brava gente’ (Bidussa, 1994, as cited in Pezzino, 2005).

All these elements have affected the regular operation of the democratic mechanism since Unification. They were also a clear obstacle to the social inclusion of immigrants, particularly the Romani peoples. Even today, it is still politically acceptable to institutionalise Romanies in ‘campi nomadi’ and to proclaim a ‘state of emergency’ with both major political blocs’ endorsement. This is possible mainly because Fascist-Nazi persecutions of Romani minority groups during the Second World War, their internment in concentration camps and extermination of large numbers as part of State policy are neglected or simply forgotten.
A number of experts have already contributed to analyse the above mentioned issues. Although these merely represent corollary subjects in my thesis, it was important to stress the fact that what is going to be discussed in the following chapter, the recent authoritarian attitude towards the Romanies, exemplified by proclamation of a ‘Nomad Emergency’ (Clough Marinaro, 2009), may be construed as a by-product of the incapacity to break away from an entrenched authoritarian tradition.

The ‘State of Emergency’ and the ‘Piano Nomadi’ in Rome

National level

At the end of 2007 and beginning of 2008 a number of ‘high-profile crimes allegedly committed by individuals of Roma ethnicity from Romania [were] extensively reported in the news, exacerbating aggressive anti-Roma rhetoric by local and national politicians’ (Amnesty International, 2012a, p. 6). As a consequence, the presence of Romani groups was associated with crime and treated as a security problem for the Italian population. In particular, the violent murder of Mrs Giovanna Reggiani, committed on October 30, 2007, supposedly by a Romanian Romani in the city of Rome, brought the ‘Nomads/Gypsies’ issue to national attention (Sigona, 2008). At the beginning of 2007, the EU’s enlargement during the centre-left Government led by Romano Prodi had also stimulated alarm among Italians with fears of an immigrant invasion from the newest entrants in the European bloc, Romania and Bulgaria (Sigona, 2010). The political turmoil was exacerbated when the centre-left mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni, resigned to become the national leader of the Democratic Party (Sigona, 2009). According to Sigona, this led to ‘a transplant of “local” issues into the national arena’ (p. 287). Thanks to Veltroni, who was in office at the time of the murder, an urgent meeting of the Italian Council of Ministers was called to tackle the alleged collective misconduct of Romani gangs. Eventually this resulted in the enactment and implementation of two governmental decrees, known as the ‘anti-Roma Acts’ (Lunaria, 2011, p. 13).

Although these decrees were ostensibly designed to curb unspecified ‘criminality’, some of them made explicit reference to ‘nomadi’ (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [ODIHR], 2009). In May 2007 the ‘Patti per la Sicurezza’ (Security Pacts) were approved by the Ministero dell’Interno and various local authorities, introducing a series of discriminatory measures ‘aimed at facilitating the removal of EU citizens from Italy whenever they were deemed to represent a threat to public and national security’ (Sigona, 2008, p. 3). These measures authorised forced evictions from illegal camps, with no requirement to observe procedural safeguards or meet regional and international human rights standards.
They also fuelled anti-Romani hysteria and violent attacks against them (ERRC, Osservazione, & Amalipé Romanò, 2010).

A year later, on May 21, 2008, the ‘Emergenza Nomadi’ intervention was launched. Initially, it involved only the Lombardy, Campania and Lazio regions, but in May 2009 it was extended to Piedmont and Veneto. The choice to adopt such an extraordinary approach not only misused the terms ‘nomads’ and ‘emergency’ vis-à-vis the Romani peoples (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 4), but also incited further efforts to disempower them. Romani voices were comprehensively ignored within the official operations of the ‘Emergency’. They were further enmeshed in a system of ‘welfare dependency’ in which government policies were directed at controlling and assimilating them.

Only amid the clamour of national and international criticism was the government forced to re-frame the rationale for its intervention. New guidelines were issued, covering the manner in which the three crucial decrees – ordinances 3676, 3677 and 3678 signed by the President of the Council of Ministries on May 30, 2008 – were to be acted upon. The government reiterated that its extraordinary measures were not intended to target any particular ethnic group but were actually motivated by the official objective of improving Romanies’ living conditions (Ministero dell’Interno, 2008).

The supposed existence of a crisis had been behind the proclamation of a ‘state of exception’. As predicted by Agamben (1998), with every extension of the ‘Emergency’ its initial provisional character morphed into the new status quo:

On May 21, 2008, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi decreed a state of emergency until May 31, 2009. [...] On May 28, 2009 yet another decree was issued, extending the state of emergency to December 31, 2010. [...] On December 17, 2010, the Prime Minister issued yet another decree extending the state of emergency to December 31, 2011. (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2012e, p. 32)

Sigona (2002) also notes how the ‘Emergency’ became a ‘new permanent political category’, a measure designed to contain a problem rather than solve it once and for all. In other words, this portrayal of an emergency allowed the government to ignore the complexity of the Romani issue and its structural causes while establishing a permanent policy of exclusion and marginalisation. Using a 1992 law, the Italian Government converted the very existence of

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8 Article 5(1) of Law No 225 of 24 February 1992 authorised the President of the Council of Ministers to declare a state of emergency in a specified area for a specified period of time. This was to enable a swift
Romani settlements into a threat to public order requiring the adoption of extraordinary means and powers. By decree of the Council of Ministers (DCPM May 21, 2008), special powers were conferred on prefects – permanent representatives of the national Government in a particular territory – allowing them to suspend existing laws (Amnesty International, 2010).

The presence of the Romani communities was thus compared to a sort of ‘natural disaster’ while, bizarrely, ‘the Emergency did not relate to the shameful conditions that Romani peoples have been forced to endure, but rather to their presence itself’ (Fiorucci, 2010, p. 34). Even though the government denied it, the ‘Nomad Emergency’ was ethnically motivated. Under it were introduced:

The monitoring of formal and informal camps, identification and census of the people (including minors) who are present there, and taking photos (‘mug shots’); the expulsion and removal of persons with irregular status; measures aimed at clearing ‘camps for nomads’ and evicting their inhabitants; as well as the opening of new ‘camps for nomads’. (ERRC, OsservAzione, & Amalipé Romanò, 2010, p. 18)

Since most ‘camp dwellers’ were of Romani origin this automatically made them the sole target of the measures adopted by the government, thus replicating the assumptions underpinning the previous Security Pacts. As Favero (2010) argued, the authorities’ main concern was to protect the ‘good’ local Italian population against the allegedly ‘bad and dangerous’ Romanies. The Italian Government, supported by an alarmed public, pushed for restrictive measures which reflected a widespread conception of the Romanies as an ‘exogenous’ threat, or even a ‘degenerate’ group, that had to be kept apart from the rest of society (Clough Marinaro, 2009). This approach was clearly in line with the expulsions recently enacted in France by then president Sarkozy.

A legal action instituted in 2008 culminated in the Council of State, Italy’s highest administrative court, declaring the ‘Nomad Emergency’ ‘unfounded and unsubstantiated’ on November 4, 2011, with its full judgment released 12 days later, on Berlusconi’s last day in office (Amnesty International, 2012a; UNAR, 2012b). But, despite this annulment, its legal and practical consequences persisted (Amnesty International, 2012a, p. 9). This left a legacy that continued to affect the way public policies specifically targeted Romanies. For instance, following Silvio Berlusconi’s resignation, which took effect on November 16, 2011, new Prime...
Minister Mario Monti re-endorsed the ‘Nomad Emergency’ (Sina, 2012). On February 15, 2012 the Monti Government appealed against the decision of the Council of State before the Court of Cassation. Three months later, on May 9, the Council of State suspended the operation of its previous ruling, pending the Court of Cassation’s ruling (Associazione 21 Luglio, ASGI, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, & Open Society Justice, 2012).

But the new Prime Minister’s policy was unclear. On February 28, two weeks after lodging its appeal, the Monti Government endorsed UNAR’s *National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Camminanti Communities*, which vowed ‘to definitively overcome the emergency phase, which has characterised the past years’ (UNAR, 2012b, p. 3). In July 2012, as Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights Nils Muižnieks noted after visiting Italy, the emergency approach was yet to be discontinued (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2012).

Despite government avowals of a return to ordinary measures in meeting its official responsibilities, the suspension announced by the Council of State allowed the city of Rome to continue implementing its ‘*Piano Nomadi*’ (Nomad Plan) unveiled in July 2009.

*Local level: Rome’s metropolitan area*

Scale of the emergency

The ‘*Piano Nomadi*’ was launched on July 31 that year in Rome. Then Interior Minister Roberto Maroni defined it as ‘a model to be exported to the rest of Italy and elsewhere in Europe’ (Clough Marinaro & Daniele, 2011, p. 622). It was the first scheme developed under special powers provided by the presidential decree that had introduced the ‘Nomad Emergency’ in May 2008 (Amnesty International, 2010). On October 22, 2008, months before the Plan was even revealed, the Italian Government – together with the CRI and the police force – had conducted a special census to ascertain how many Romanies would be affected by the extraordinary measures. The census was carried out in the three major Italian cities (Rome, Milan and Naples) where the ‘*Emergenza Nomadi*’ was considered most urgent. In the city of Rome alone, the task of identification, prerogative of the CRI, revealed the existence of 167 encampments (ODIHR, 2009). Of these, 124 were ‘*abusivi*’ (illegal) while 43 were ‘*autorizzati*’ (recognised). According to the census, 12,346 people were living in these camps, almost half of them (5,436) children. It was also estimated that at least as many people had abandoned their dwellings since the state of emergency had been declared (Ministero dell’Interno, 2009a).

Prefects were authorised to ‘carry out a census of individuals and families, children as well, and to collect and store personal information, including photos and fingerprints’ (Amnesty International, 2012a, p. 9). This minority group perceives the state as a threat. Afraid of being
singled out and deported, many Romanies left the encampments before or during the census. The CoE (2012b) notes,

when required to register or to be fingerprinted they fear the worst. This is all the more understandable when they explain how they see similarities between much of today’s anti-Roma rhetoric with the language used in the past in Europe by Nazis and fascists and other extremists. (p. 8)

The identification process was carried out with the aim of issuing a document known as a DAST (Document Authorising Temporary Stay). This paper would give the holder the right to reside for two years in a specified authorised camp (Amnesty International, 2012a). Ominously, DASTs were also ‘granted’ to ‘Roma individuals with Italian citizenship who, according to the Constitution (art. 16, para. 1), have a full right to circulate freely throughout national territory’ (Lunaria, 2011, p. 47).

When the ‘Piano Nomadi’ was about to be enacted by the right-wing administration of Mayor Gianni Alemanno, the city of Rome appeared to face the most drastic situation of all when it came to the living conditions of Romani communities. More than 80 ‘insediamenti abusivi’ (illegal or unauthorised encampments), 14 ‘campi tollerati’ (tolerated camps) and seven ‘villaggi autorizzati’ (authorised villages) were counted (Comune di Roma, 2009b). According to the census results released by the city council in 2009, some 2,200 people lived in the first settlement type, 2,736 in the second type and 2,241 in the last-mentioned type. With an estimated (December 2008) population of 2,844,821 for Rome (Ferrazza & Menghi, 2010), camp-dwellers amounted to only 0.25 per cent of the capital city’s entire population. Yet, despite these numbers, Rome, which ‘has the highest number of Romani inhabitants’ and is ‘the main destination for rising numbers of Romanian Roma’, was ‘the focus of various media alarms referring to an “invasion” and “threats” posed by these groups’ (Clough Marinaro, 2009, p. 274).

Re-organisation and optimisation

Rome’s ‘Nomad Plan’ envisaged the comprehensive re-organisation of existing camps (Cittalia, 2011). The principal goals were the progressive closure of all the illegal and tolerated camps strewn across the city, the renovation of ‘authorised’ camps and the establishment of new ones. The municipality of Rome planned to settle 6,000 camp inhabitants in 13 official ‘authorised villages’, all located on the urban fringe (Open Society Foundations & Open Society
One of the first critiques to emerge after the plan was sketched out concerned doubts over local authorities’ capacity to carry it out. How could more than 12,000 people live in the 13 authorised encampments, which were already full and had capacity for only 6,000? It seemed clear from the outset that not everyone could be accommodated there. The mere creation of a transitional ‘Centro Emergenza Rom’ (Romani Emergency Centre) with a capacity for only 600 people, as envisaged in the plan itself (Comune di Roma, 2009b), could not be considered a suitable solution.

As pointed out by Amnesty International (2010) in a recent report significantly entitled The Wrong Answer, the eligibility criteria for a place in one of the 13 ‘villages’ had also not been properly considered by the authorities:

The criteria to determine who has access to the ‘villages’ would be based on good conduct – for instance, whether or not they had been involved in criminal activity. It is unclear whether this refers to a criminal conviction or whether mere criminal charges would be sufficient to deny a person a place in one of the new camps. Either way, the right to adequate housing is a basic human right, which cannot depend on past behaviour. (pp. 4-5)

Demolitions, forced evictions and other human rights violations were also major concerns. Lack of consultation with the individuals and communities affected by the plan, and the inadequacy of the housing solution offered, shed light on the rationale behind this official approach. According to Amnesty International (2010), many Romanies did not know how the administration’s plan would affect them personally. Neither had Romani organisations and CSOs working in the camps been consulted. Most importantly and unsurprisingly, the Romanies ‘interviewed by Amnesty International stated that they would prefer to live in ordinary accommodation’ (p. 5), rather than being housed in metal containers within the confines of a camp. All these factors highlighted the limitations of the ‘Piano Nomadi’ (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2010; Lunaria, 2011).

From ‘solidarity’ to ‘authorized/equipped’ villages

Implementation of the plan was in line with the policy adopted by Alemanno’s immediate predecessor as mayor, left-winger Walter Veltroni. Veltroni had actually been the first to launch the idea of building ‘mega-camps’ for Romani peoples. Although Veltroni managed in 2005 to complete only one of the four ‘Villaggi della Solidarietà’ he had planned,
this type of accommodation would ‘serve as the prototype for future ones’ (Clough Marinaro, 2009, p. 278). The approach of Veltroni’s Left wing administration has been described by Clough Marinaro (2009) as deeply contradictory, oscillating between a vague sense of solidarity and a policy of exclusion. Veltroni’s major concerns were the urban renewal of previously neglected working-class neighbourhoods and fostering a positive multicultural environment through the funding of intercultural projects and associations. His progressive project was stymied by the inhumane living conditions. His ‘strategia d’integrazione’ (integration strategy) had two main features: the creation of four ‘mega campi’ outside the city’s ring road, and the portrayal of Romanies as a security risk.

The formal camp at Castel Romano, built after the dismantling of the more central camp of Vicolo Savini, illustrated Veltroni’s approach to Romani issues, in that it was meant to be a ‘model camp’ under the ‘Patto per Roma Sicura’ (Rome Security Pact) launched in May 2007. This camp had originally been established in 2005 alongside Pontina Road, a busy thoroughfare with the second highest rate of fatal car accidents in all Italy. Built on a nature reserve named Decima Malafede, it is 30 km from the city centre and 5 km from the nearest town (EUropean ROma MAppling, 2008). Because of its extreme isolation, which forced residents to go to Rome or Pomezia for supplies and services, the ‘equipped village’ could be hardly considered fit to host 1000 or more people. It was made up of poorly insulated prefabricated metal huts, laid out in a grid and surrounded by high metal fencing, with no shade or greenery, or areas for socializing. Large parts of the plumbing and sewage system are defective and there is only one well that provides insufficient water for the needs of all the inhabitants, which they receive for a few hours a day. The water is undrinkable and there have been reports of residents contracting scabies and hepatitis. (Clough Marinaro, 2009, pp. 278-279)

The right-wing Alemanno administration continued its predecessor’s strategy but made also a number of innovations. Among these was stricter attention to official supervision of the Romani residents in what were now called ‘villaggi attrezzati’ (equipped villages). This particular aspect emerged from the ‘Camp Regulations’ adopted in February 2009 by local authorities in Lazio region. These envisaged the presence of security officers in charge of controlling entry points to the camp and its residents; and video surveillance devices (Ministero dell’Interno, 2009b; Daniele, 2011a, p. 17). This severely limited the ‘basic rights of access, residence and freedom of movement within authorised camps’ (Open Society
Foundations & Open Society Justice Initiative, 2010, p. 4). One the most controversial issues arising during the implementation of the ‘Piano Nomadi’ occurred in relation to the Barbuta camp, one of the villages the Alemanno administration planned to build *ex novo*.

The Barbuta camp and its contradictions

The encampment site abuts Ciampino Airport. It is close to an existing unauthorised shanty town which the city council wants demolished and transferred to the new site. In light of the Council of State’s ruling of November 2011, and the suspension of that ruling six months later, the legal status of the camp became unclear. Council took advantage of this uncertainty to complete new camp construction (Amnesty International, 2012a). On March 20, 2012, the organisations ASGI and Associazione 21 Luglio took legal action against the Alemanno administration, requiring the Tribunale di Roma to verify and stop discriminatory measures they saw it was pursuing. In disregard of the Council of State’s latest ruling, council began the first relocations to the Barbuta camp in June 2012 (ASGI, 2012). The two associations condemned other aspects of council’s conduct as well, saying the project cost was disproportionate to the housing solution adopted, and that the proposal to build a new camp had entailed preserving, not dismantling, the old informal settlement (Serpieri, 2012).

On August 8, 2012, the Tribunale di Roma approved the stay requested by ASGI and Associazione 21 Luglio, and ordered that relocations to the Barbuta camp cease. The Alemanno administration appealed against this decision and a month later the same court issued a new sentence, noting that the city of Rome was not discriminating against Romani peoples (‘Piano Nomadi,’ 2012).

It is worth noting that these legal cases were being heard while the Council of State’s finding as to the constitutional validity of the state of emergency was still under appeal (ERRC, 2012). Yet the city of Rome ploughed ahead with the ‘*Piano Nomadi*’ and its ‘camps policy’, regardless of human rights violations and objections voiced by both national and international organisations. This point had been explicitly recognised in the ‘National Strategy’ document that the government’s anti-discrimination body, UNAR, released in February 2012. According to UNAR, housing Romani communities inside ‘*campi nomadi*’ had worsened their segregation and prevented their social inclusion (UNAR, 2012b, p. 15).

UNAR deplored the camps as the wrong answer to the situation facing Romani people. Not only did these sites fail to meet the needs of a population that should no longer be considered nomadic, argued UNAR, but the camps had forced different groups to coexist next to each other in conditions of humiliating social degradation and exclusion from mainstream
society. The camps were described as often ill-equipped and unsanitary (pp. 84-85). A stark contradiction thus appeared between statements in the government report, with their emphasis on new guidelines to encourage social inclusion of Romani people, and the course of action being adopted at the local level of government.

In the city of Rome, for instance, Deputy Mayor Sveva Belviso was still speaking of the camps in September 2012 as transitional ‘centri di accoglienza’ (shelters for the needy), which, as she would have it, featured ‘all mod cons’, a ‘solution’ whose social utility could eventually be extended to all people with housing problems. According to Belviso, the city council’s ‘equipped villages’ should be thought of as a privilege extended to the Romani communities. In her words, ‘This is not a form of discrimination against the Romani peoples. If we want to talk about discrimination, it probably exists in the approach [we take] to all the Italian homeless who do not have the right to this alternative’ (as cited in Lista, 2012).

**Political bipartisanship on Romani issues**

While conducting fieldwork for this research, I observed a tendency, among both national and international activists as well as scholars, to criticise right-wing administrations and politicians. Their main targets were the politics of the Berlusconi Government on the national level, and of the then Mayor of Rome, Gianni Alemanno, on the local level. They appeared to be the only culprits responsible for the ‘Nomad Emergency’.

Broadly speaking, xenophobia is generally understood as a hallmark of the right wing. Certainly, the Right in Italy has the historical tendency to fuel racist tropes, particularly in relation to issues such as crime and security (Naletto, 2009; Vannucci & Della Porta, 2011). As argued by Chiarini (2011), for half a century (and more) the Right was ‘synonymous with Fascism’ (p. 141). In the last two decades, the right-wing separatist Northern League, one of Berlusconi’s closest allies, often made immigrants’ presence a political issue, and demonised ‘aliens’ in general as a security problem (Chiarini, 2011). To the national ascendancy of this party, together with right-wing party Alleanza Nazionale (AN)9 and Forza Italia during the 1990s, must be added the emergence of assorted fascistic organisations such as Casa Pound, Forza Nuova, Militia and Contro Tempo (Berizzi, 2012).

As reported by Sigona (2008), though, ‘the old dichotomy which sees “security” as a prerogative of the right-wing and “solidarity” of the left-wing’ (p. 8) was disrupted by the introduction of Emergency decree no. 181/2007 under a centre-left national administration. This was one of a series of policy proposals labelled ‘Pacchetto Sicurezza’ (Security Pacts),

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9 AN, an evolution of the former neo-fascist party Italian Social Movement (MSI), ‘never really renounced its fascist history’ (Chiarini, 2011, p. 150).
which Prime Minister Romano Prodi had issued after the murder of Mrs Giovanna Reggiani. In particular it was the head of the left-wing Democratic Party, the then Mayor Veltroni, who was the first leader of a Left administration to co-opt the Right’s approach to security (Sigona, 2008, p. 8). The main feature of the decree was that it introduced certain residence conditions for non-citizens, which deepened the insecurity of undocumented migrants. Some of these ‘emergency’ measures explicitly targeted Romanies or ‘nomads’ (ECRI, 2012, p. 8).

But the decision to take a hard line against Romanies is not the result of a recent ideological shift. In many ways it is an issue that always transcended political affiliations. For instance, formalisation of the Romani presence by means of a ‘camps strategy’ in Rome was actually instigated by a left-wing administration in 1993 under Mayor Francesco Rutelli. It was during Rutelli’s time at the helm that the first ‘equipped camps’ were built and projects to design separate schools for Romani children were reintroduced (Fiorucci, 2010).

Clough Marinaro (2003, 2009) argues that Rutelli’s approach to Romani issues back then should be considered the real precursor of the present politics of criminalisation. ‘The ethnically discriminatory collection of personal data, the definition of Roma collectively as a “nomad emergency”, and the alternative of living in approved camps or exposure to mass deportation’ (Clough Marinaro, 2009, p. 275) were all first introduced under Rutelli. Police raids, demolition of unauthorised camps and forced resettlement were also part of the then mayor’s armoury. In 1995 Rutelli was responsible for the first ethnically based data collection on Romanies living in Rome (Clough Marinaro, 2009), his aim being to corral them into specified and controlled zones, which only those with photo ID could access (Rondinelli, 2008). As early as 1997, Rutelli had characterised the presence of Romanies in the capital as a ‘nomad emergency’ and a security issue, promoting the expulsion of ‘irregulars’ (Martirano, 1997). Mayor Rutelli remained in office until 2001 when he decided to compete, unsuccessfully, against Berlusconi in the general election. According to Clough Marinaro (2009), as the actual election period neared, Rutelli bolstered his campaign by intensifying his criminalising discourse and repeatedly referring to an ‘emergenza nomadi’ (Gypsy emergency) to justify increasing expulsions from the city. Within the context of a vocally anti-immigrant campaign by Berlusconi’s centre-right coalition, Rutelli sought to demonstrate that he too could respond to security threats supposedly posed by groups like the Roma. (p. 275)

Rutelli revisited this approach in 2008, when he announced his intention to re-contest the
mayoralty, leading a local centre-left coalition. During the campaign, Rutelli used the ‘questione nomadi’ (nomads issue) as one of the main planks of his political platform (Rondinelli, 2008). He invoked the introduction of tougher measures against Romanies, especially those involved in criminal activities. In particular, the mayoral candidate focused on the Casilino 900 camp (Daniele, 2011a, p. 17). Notably, both candidates campaigned for its dismantlement. By the time the authorities began to ‘clean up’ the camp in January 2010 – an operation that entailed the transfer of more than 600 Romani individuals – Casilino 900 was one of the largest camps in Europe and the oldest Romani settlement in Rome (EveryOne Group, 2009).

For the new right-wing administration, closing this shanty town in the heart of the capital was a great symbolic victory, demonstrating that it had succeeded where two previous left-wing governments had failed. Romani intellectual Nazzareno Guarnieri (as cited in Associazione 21 Luglio, 2011a) differed. This was not ‘a victory of the city over urban decay, but a humiliating defeat for civilisation’ (p. 7).

Using the Romani issue as part of electioneering was nothing new. Already, in May 2006, it had played an important part in another mayoral campaign. At that poll, Veltroni – first elevated to office in 2001 – won re-election as Mayor of Rome by defeating Alemanno. During the campaign, constant links were made between Romanies and the ‘campi nomadi’, as they were between irregular immigration and security concerns. That is why a recent study concluded it would be

hypocritical to blame the Alemanno administration alone for Roma people’s current standard of living in the capital. The ‘Nomad Plan’ approved by the centre-Right administration in 2009 [was basically] the logical extension of the ‘Pact for a Safe Rome’ agreed by Mayor Walter Veltroni and the Interior Ministry on May 18, 2007. (Lunaria, 2011, p. 152)

In conclusion, neither left-wing nor right-wing coalitions showed the political will to innovate and initiate courageous reforms in respect of the Romani population. A ‘tough’ stance on Romani issues has so far been the common default position. Under Rutelli, Veltroni and Alemanno, this type of approach took precedence. No deliberations were ever held on what steps might have led to a more sustainable and humane policy in meeting the needs of one of the most deprived and marginalised populations in Europe. The history of these three civic leaders reveals a shared inability to find viable alternatives to the camps. Epitomising
discrimination, segregation and exclusion, the camps fed, and continue to feed, the very insecurity that local authorities ostensibly oppose.

**Inadequacy of the ‘National Strategy’**

*Political invisibility of the Romani peoples*

One of the major problems for the Romani peoples in Italy is their almost total absence from the political arena. Not only these minorities continue to live in a condition of economic, social and cultural marginalisation, but the possibility to express active citizenship through an informed participation remains an unresolved issue (Riniolo & Marcaletti, 2013). A recent survey conducted by Sigona (2009) in the cities of Bolzano (Bozen), Mantua, Milan and Rome analysed the level of political involvement by these communities and emphasised their exclusion from political life. According to this research, the left-wing Rifondazione Comunista was the only party to include Romani candidates in its 2006 electoral list. On this occasion, the only successful Romani candidate was Del Bar Yuri, a centre-left candidate, who became one of the Communists’ three city councillors in Mantua. In Bolzano (Bozen) and Milan, Romani candidates Radames Gabrielli and Dijana Pavlovic were unsuccessful. In both cities, the centre-Right coalition candidate won. As for the city of Rome, ‘no Roma or Sinti candidate stood for election’ (p. 277).

Sigona’s analysis of the manifestos and utterances of the main political contenders in the elections under investigation reveals a comprehensive ‘denial’ of any Romani ‘political subjectivity’ (p. 277). The Romani communities were mainly summed up in stereotypical tropes such as ‘nomads’, ‘a threat to public security’ and personifying a ‘humanitarian emergency’ and by references to ‘urban decorum and [the] welfare system’ (p. 277).

Despite their political invisibility, in all four locations the ‘Gypsy problem’ came to play a key role in the local elections of 2006: that is, ‘before the issue became a national “emergency” in November 2007’ (p. 287). Political engagement by the Romani peoples was further discouraged by the fact that neither public institutions nor CSOs working on Romani-related issues were interested in promoting it. Both seemed unable to advance initiatives that might inspire Romani political participation, ‘either as voters or candidates (for Italian Roma and Sinti) or in consultative bodies (for non-Italian Roma)’ (p. 288). A couple of years later, during a fact-finding mission to Milan, Naples and Rome in the week of July 20-26, 2008, an ODIHR delegation (2009) noted

with concern the low level of involvement and representation of Roma and Sinti in direct
dialogue and consultations with the authorities. In this regard, it has been also noted that the interests and concerns of the Roma and Sinti communities are often not voiced or represented directly by themselves but rather through intermediaries. (p. 10)

Dijana Pavlovic (as cited in OsservAzione, 2006) came to the same conclusion. She said, ‘some associations seem too much inclined to mediation with local authorities because of their funding dependency. [...] In other words, the Romani voice is always mediated by these associations’ (p. 32).

Yet a number of international conventions stress the importance of increasing the participation in politics by national minority groups. Article 2.2 of the UN General Assembly’s 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities states that ‘persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life’ (CoE, 2012b, p. 207). The 1995 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities points out (in art. 15) the importance of creating ‘the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them’ (p. 207). Nonetheless, as observed by the European Committee of Social Rights in 2010, one of the main obstacles depriving the Romani peoples in Italy (particularly camp-dwellers) of the capacity to formally exercise their rights to take part in decision-making has been the ‘lack of personal status or denial of citizenship or a residence permit’ (CoE, 2012b, p. 209).

In the end, while Romani peoples have always been at greater risk of social exclusion and marginalisation than other national minorities, public bodies and CSOs have been unable to counter this situation. A number of global institutions have censored the Italian Government over the past decade for acting towards the Romani peoples in a discriminatory manner. Yet, no specific steps were taken to address their needs and encourage their full participation in public life. One obvious bone of contention has been the policy of establishing camps. These are seen as isolated zones, devoid of basic facilities, perpetuating systematic ghettoisation and exclusion (CERD, 2000, 2008; European Committee of Social Rights, 2010; ERRC, 2000).

A ‘National Strategy’

Under pressure from EU agencies, the Italian Government has recently made an effort to develop a unified policy and guiding philosophy in prior consultation with Romani
representatives. This approach is based on four pillars: access to housing, employment, education and health care (ODIHR, 2009). It marks a major departure: until 2008, notes Clough Marinaro (2009), ‘no explicit policy concerning Roma existed at the national level, and different practices and regulations were applied in different cities and regions’ (p. 274). If one could pinpoint when things began to change, it may have been February 2011, with the publication of a special report by the SCPPHR of the Senate of the Republic.

This document, entitled the Final Report on the Condition of Roma, Sinti and Camminanti in Italy and enjoying bipartisan support, was the very first example of research commissioned by the Parliament on the circumstances of Italy’s Romanies. The document explicitly criticised the government’s ‘camps policy’ and expressed concern about the parlous conditions of the 40,000 Romanies living in camps. As regards the city of Rome, the report judged the ‘Piano Nomadi’ a failure, stating: ‘To solve the Romani question efficiently, in terms of both national security and social integration, it would be useful to explore fresh solutions that go beyond campizzazione [campisation]’ (p. 59). The report also gave tacit endorsement to the conclusions drawn by the delegation from the OSCE agency ODIHR after its fact-finding mission to Milan, Naples and Rome in July 2008:

The measures adopted by the government, starting with the declaration of a state of emergency, were disproportionate in relation to the actual scale of the security threat related to irregular immigration and the situation the Roma and Sinti settlements. Moreover, the delegation is concerned that the measures taken, by in effect targeting one particular community, namely the Roma or Sinti (or ‘nomads’), along with often alarmist and inflammatory reporting in the media and statements by well-known and influential political figures, fuelled anti-Roma bias in the society at large and contributed to the stigmatization of the Roma and Sinti community in Italy. (p. 42)

Based on this document, the Italian Government drafted its own national plan for the social inclusion of this minority group (Mercenaro, 2012a). The launch of UNAR’s ‘National Strategy’ mentioned earlier in this chapter – with the title European Commission Communication no. 173/2011 – signalled, as a member of the Senate’s SCPPHR argued, the advent of a new ‘counter-culture’ in terms of government attitude (Di Giovan Paolo, 2012). In line with the Europe 2020 growth strategy, this action was part of a larger initiative conceived on a Continental scale, to address Romani needs with a targeted approach directed at incorporating and adapting the National Romani Integration Strategies within the EU framework (European
Commission, 2011). This mounting interest in the condition of the Romani peoples marked ‘an unprecedented commitment by EU member States to promoting the inclusion of Roma on their territory’ (European Commission, 2012, para. 1).

But, despite the Italian Government’s pledge to turn over a new leaf in its stance on social inclusion, the follow-up fell short. Several operative factors made it impossible to bridge the gaps between the theoretical framework of the ‘National Strategy’ and the practical possibility of real change. The strategy had been adopted as part of an inter-ministerial approach, a systemic effort involving all the stakeholders along the four axes of intervention, as foreseen by the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020:

- Access to education: Ensure that all Roma children complete at least primary school; [
- Access to employment: Cut the employment gap between Roma and the rest of the population; [
- Access to healthcare: Reduce the gap in health status between the Roma and the rest of the population; [
- Access to housing and essential services: Close the gap between the share of Roma with access to housing and to public utilities (such as water, electricity and gas) and that of the rest of the population. (European Commission, 2011, pp. 4-7)

While declaring the adoption of a ‘human rights-based approach’, and linking it to the ‘Fundamental Principles’ (Articles 1-12) of the Italian Constitution, the Italian ‘National Strategy’ (UNAR, 2012b, p. 18-20) provides a number of examples of its application in a more ‘consistent and effective manner’. For instance, it is cited the pilot-project launched in 2000 to teach the foreign languages and cultures of ethnic groups to the State Police officers as a way to raise awareness and training in the field of human rights. The establishment in 2010, of the Observatory for the protection against discriminatory acts (OSCAD) is another example. At the same time the document also recognises that all these initiatives are not sufficient to ensure the creation of a human rights culture.

The need to move away from an emergency approach, the introduction of long and medium-term actions, as part of an inter-ministerial endeavour, the support to a

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10 These included: the Minister for International Cooperation and Integration, the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, the Minister of Interior, the Minister on Health, the Minister on Education, University and Research, and the Minister of Justice, representatives of regional and local authorities and mayors of large urban areas (UNAR, 2012b, p. 5).
comprehensive process of cultural growth, involving the society as whole, are some of the general objectives of the strategy repeatedly mentioned throughout the document. In order to achieve these goals the governance system of the strategy is set up as follows: Inter-Ministerial political Table/Control room; a control room with Regions and Local Authorities; a Roma, Sinti and Camminanti (RSC) Communities Forum; National Tables; ad hoc Working Groups Regional/local Tables (UNAR, 2012b, p. 30).

The document thus presents the core aspects of the ‘National Strategy’, which is made of systemic actions, cross-cutting axes of intervention and specific objectives.

The first systemic action, titled ‘Increasing the institutional and civil society capacity-building for the social inclusion of the RSC people’ refers to ‘key-ideas’ that can help to improve the ‘capacity-building’ expressed by institutions and civil society organisations dealing with Romani- and discrimination-related issues. As for the second action, which is titled ‘Promoting a permanent integrated system of networks and territorial centers against all forms of discrimination’, this relates to the ‘establishment of a national network of local antennas for detecting and taking charge of the phenomena of discrimination’ (p. 35). The third action instead is about ‘Programming an integrated information, communication and mediation strategy aimed at eradicating prejudices and stereotypes against the RSC communities’ (p.40). Finally, the fourth Action aims at ‘Developing and testing a participatory model of the RSC communities at the national and local decision-making levels’ (p. 44). Within each of these actions, a number of initiatives are generally only roughly sketched and it is never really possible to gauge their potential impact and feasibility. The vagueness of the document becomes even more evident when analysing the section of the strategy dedicated to the four axes of intervention and their specific objectives.

In the end, it is safe to say the ‘National Strategy’ has a complex structure which is often repetitive, wordy and hard to follow. It is mostly driven by good will, but there is no clear evidence of new ways to create a real change, not enough information to understand how to achieve the objectives planned and to evaluate the expected results. The document looks more like a summary of suggestions and the main initiatives carried out across the nation in recent years and a confirmation of the situation of the Romanies and its causes, rather than a strategic plan to close the gap between mainstream society and these minority groups. Most importantly, the role of the Romani peoples remains always marginal.

A tokenistic role

The most welcome new element in this fresh initiative was that for the first time it
contemplated co-operating with the representatives of Romani communities in Italy. ‘The aim of engaging in a participatory manner, not only men and children, but also women and girls’ belonging to the different Romani groups was clearly stressed within the strategy framework (Unar, 2012b, p. 21). Romani organisations were actually consulted during the design phase. But very little scope was granted to them, and they ultimately had little influence on the decision-making process. UNAR was the official body designated by the Italian Government for developing and co-ordinating the entire strategy. Together with a series of initiatives directed at preventing episodes of racial hatred, one of the main goals of this body was to include the Romani peoples in the devising of a ‘National Strategy’ (UNAR, 2012b).

UNAR produced a 100-page document as a first draft and on February 17, 2012, forwarded it to all Romani associations. Only a few days later they were invited to a meeting at UNAR’s head office, where they were given a chance to comment on the draft or suggest amendments to it (U Velto, 2012a). The tight time limit permitted for preparing a response spoke volumes about the type of involvement that was on offer.

This is how Federazione Rom e Sinti Insieme described the draft at that meeting arranged by UNAR for February 22:

It is too weighty and illustrates a number of measures that are too hard to analyse in only a few hours. It is also difficult to express an opinion regarding its capacity to influence conditions for more than 100,000 Romani peoples living in Italy. If all the references to what was done, suggested or written in the past could be removed, the strategy would be more original and less ponderous, and the positive proposals would be more readily appreciated. (U Velto, 2012a, para. 4)

On May 30 the president of Fondazione Romani, Nazzareno Guarnieri, organised a meeting to discuss the new ‘National Strategy’. Representatives from several organisations working on Romani issues joined academics and politicians in contributing:

Some defined [the ‘National Strategy’] as redundant, while others saw in it a new means of controlling Romani peoples. As a matter of fact [the proposed consultation with Romani organisations] represents a mere advisory forum. The government sits the main Romani organisations around the same table, but they are given next to no time to work through their response in the planning stage. As for the future, we will remain in thrall to decisions dictated from the top. (Personal communication, May 30, 2012)
Guarnieri argued that Romani peoples needed a ‘governing’ body rather than a ‘consultative’ one. They were still being relegated to a token role, he noted.

**Impressions from the field**

A number of Romani activists and intellectuals, as well as non-Romani advocates and CSO representatives, have criticised the ‘National Strategy’. Their chief complaint is that the new approach still does not treat self-determination for Romani communities as a priority. They were not offered a genuine opportunity to be involved in designing and executing projects for the betterment of their own lives. Other issues discussed during my research interviews included: the little time granted to Romani and non-Romani organisations for formulating their own proposals, insipid recommendations contained in the strategy, the small amount of executive power conceded to UNAR, and testy relations among the different organisations working on Romani issues. The following section provides an overview of the main criticisms of the ‘National Strategy’ that emerged during my fieldwork.

**‘A book of dreams’**

The following comment was made by Italian academic and expert on Romani issues Marco Brazzoduro during a private meeting in the presence of several official and Third Sector representatives:

This is a book of dreams, of good intentions and nice words. ‘No to the nomad camps’ is repeated many times. In every section of the ‘National Strategy’ there are many redundancies. The new European Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks, has also criticised the document for its ‘pompous and pretentious mumbo-jumbo’ and made the following observation: ‘I could read till page 30, and then I could not continue any longer’. It is tiresome: the same things are repeated over and over using *burocratese ampolloso e altisonante* (pompous and pretentious gobbledygook). What’s the bottom line? They talk about holding regional and local round tables, but who should organise them? How would they work? Who could take part? In short, everything is still to be determined! But the most striking thing is that they decide to create this beautiful thing, with its noble architecture and splendid values, and then the mayors of Rome and Milan keep evicting Romanies as much as they like! So what power does UNAR have to influence political decisions? (Personal communication, July 21, 2012)
Guarnieri also expressed doubts about UNAR’s capacity to shift the government’s Romani policy:

UNAR is a governmental body and it is supposed to ‘control’ the government? Do you really think UNAR can control the government that actually created it? This is a clear contradiction. Of course, there are limits at a European level too. In a European society that is increasingly multicultural, if there are no clear and rigid rules to combat discrimination and racism we will never be able to improve the situation of the Romani peoples. (personal communication, June 26, 2012)

Marco Brazzoduro illustrated this point in more detail:

As argued by Associazione 21 Luglio, UNAR does not have funding independence at the moment. This issue undermines its autonomy and capacity to fulfil its official obligations. Hence the ‘National Strategy’ is just a ‘carta morta’ [literally ‘a dead sheet of paper’], it does not have its own funds and never will. Besides, UNAR’s personnel numbers were recently slashed. It has only 13 employees at the moment and there should be double that. Unfortunately its staff is going to be downsized even more. Even the director is headed for the high jump. So, I do not really know how the full-inclusion strategy will proceed. (Personal communication, July 11, 2012)

**Top-down relationships**

On the prospect of Romanies being given an opportunity to influence government decisions, a representative of Federazione Romani had this to say:

We had scant time to develop our proposals. We had six days to write about a strategy for the coming eight years! [...] The first 50 pages of the UNAR document were all about the good deeds carried out in the past: 50 pages on everything Italy’s done for the Romani peoples. [...] We are being invited to meet UNAR, then UNAR will meet the other authorities (provincial, regional, Italian Cabinet ministers, the CoE), but we will never really play a part in shaping decisions. At the very least we will only do what they have decided for us. [...] If you talk with UNAR they will tell you the Romani peoples were involved in defining a national strategy and that they are just doing what we requested.
But it is not like that. As a Romani person and representing a Romani organisation, I want to be a part of all meetings where decisions are taken. They have to at least give us a chance to listen to what they are on about. Given that they are talking here about me and the destiny of my people, we should sit around the table together and have the power to oppose any decision of theirs if we believe it is not in our best interest.

(Graziano Halilovic, personal communication, April 28, 2012)

Guarnieri also cited the small scope for participation by Romani representatives as one of the ‘National Strategy’’s weakest points. A ‘partnership approach’ (Cemlyn, 2000b) whereby officialdom would be ready to learn from and with the Romanies – and willing to share power – was nowhere to be seen. But Guarneri also pointed to the lack of overt criticism from Romani organisations:

First of all, the ‘Strategy’ lacked real rigour. It is not clear how UNAR plans to attain the goals identified in the document. Secondly, UNAR asked the Romani organisations for their contribution but in the end simply ignored them. UNAR has included in this document the same disastrous initiatives it tried in the past. These are going to be repeated in the future as well. I protested and spoke my mind quite openly. [...] Before the meeting started, everyone was criticising the Strategy, but during the meeting I was the only one to speak up. The most shocking thing for me was that even big organisations, such as UNICEF and Amnesty International, did not pipe up. Everyone was there just to be able to claim a slice of the cake. [...] For instance, UNAR included among the so-called ‘best practices’ the Equal Rom program it had carried out in Turin. More than € 1 million was invested and in the end only one Romani guy was employed. And his job lasted only 20 days: is that good practice? [...] UNAR talked about giving Romani peoples a voice. Where are the Romani peoples? They said, ‘Let’s give them a voice’ but then they do not use it. [...] The big problem today is the lack of participation, a ‘qualified’ participation! UNAR has created an inter-ministerial body, a ‘cabina di regia’ [control room] as they called it, but without having any Romanies in it. Instead they’ve given us a small ‘contentino’ [a sop]. They created an ‘open forum’ involving the Romani organisations. This is nonsense, it is a mere ‘carrozzone autoreferenziale’ [self-referential bandwagon]. UNAR disliked this definition, but that’s what it really is. In fact, if Romani peoples are not granted decision-making powers, what is the purpose of creating a ‘forum’? In the end no one protested, Romanies included, so long as they could remain
The representatives of a number of non-Romani CSOs have also joined in criticism of the ‘National Strategy’. The spokesperson for Casa dei Diritti Sociali (CDS), for instance, defined it as ‘a mere consultative body, an observer with no decision-making authority. The forum of associations promoted by UNAR surely represents an opportunity to vent our opinions, but in the end these are not really used to make any real change’ (personal communication, June 22, 2012).

*Internal rivalries and the need for Romani participation*

The existence of internal divisions is of extreme importance, especially when the Romani issue has found its niche within the larger European framework. Because of this, as Guarnieri argues, deciding which Romani individuals to work with should be tackled with great care:

This is a historical landmark and we have to take advantage of it, even if this is all the result of pressure coming from European institutions. We should have the maturity to be united and to exchange views with one another. But if we want to achieve concrete progress we should work only with those who are willing to commit to this project. The ‘National Strategy’ must not become the ‘sfogatoio’ [a place to let off steam] for all our problems. It is not possible to bring all Romani peoples around the same table, each with their own particular problem. Anyway, we more or less know what the problems are. But if our aim is to become more effective, we will need to create a small team – highly motivated, highly qualified and deeply united. I’ve taken part in many ‘tavoli’ [round tables] with a number of Romani organisations, but their focus is usually more local than national. On top of that, they never set themselves practical objectives. We should follow the example of the Jewish community. They are also riven with internal divisions but in the end they manage to speak with one voice. We also have to learn to pull together in the common cause. Our people must co-operate to forge a unified strategy, and never leave decisions in the hands of one person or one body alone. (Personal communication, May 30, 2012)
The problem of political representation among Romanies was pointed out by Fulvia Motta, a representative of the charity Caritas. According to Motta, this problem is common among immigrant communities in general, especially in the city of Rome.

In Rome you will find people of more than 100 national origins. These foreign communities are not very strong and tend to be dispersed within the city. In other cities, where they are more cohesive, perhaps they have a better chance of communicating with public authorities. In Rome they are not only scattered across town, they are also constantly fighting one another. And public bodies have no time for them. In Rome we have the ‘consiglieri aggiunti’ [additional councillors], there to represent the interests of foreigners in our midst. There are only three of them, though, while there are 120 communities in the city. Who, really, do they represent? Only a fraction of the immigrant population. It is important that they exist, but these communities are incapable of speaking for themselves. Romani peoples are not well organised among themselves. There are strong disagreements between different groups. If they cannot agree with each other, no wonder public authorities are not going to listen to them.

(Personal communication, June 11, 2012)

A CDS representative said the Third Sector also needed to accept some responsibility: ‘If we were all united, not thinking too much about our personal interests, things would be different. The truth is that we are unable to put a strategy together that overcomes our differences’ (Personal communication, June 22, 2012).

From ‘project factory’ to ‘systemic actions’

Nicolae Gheorghe, a Romani intellectual from Romania but with a deep understanding of Italian circumstances, believes that, despite its limitations, the prospect of developing a ‘National Strategy’ together is a great opportunity that must not be missed:

The Romani issue is going to be very trendy for a few years – maybe for the next two to five years. We need to use all available resources to get supplementary assistance. Maybe I am a bit naïve, but an alliance between experts in the social sector and intellectuals can provide the Romani peoples with the know-how to act more strategically. They can aspire to become ‘funzionari’ or ‘burocrati di progetto’ [public servants or project managers]. The younger generations should get involved. If at this
juncture we cannot create significant change, I am afraid we might be paving the way for extremist, nationalistic and racist discourses. This is because mainstream society will start thinking that, although bags of money were spent on improving the lives of the Romanies, they continued to live as criminals and tax evaders. (Personal communication, July 21, 2012)

Guarnieri largely agreed with this proposition, except on one point. He stressed that the use of resources and the type of action to be carried out should be carefully planned. The goal should not simply be to launch new projects, but rather to promote only those that could guarantee a long-term impact on government policies and real change.

Many organisations are merely interested in signing contracts and getting some money. They do not have any philosophy on the Romani issue. They do not have an all-encompassing zeal to change the situation of the Romani peoples. We do not need a forum of Romani organisations. Romanies have to be part of the inter-ministerial meetings. I am not interested in managing inclusion projects; I am more interested in being involved in the making of political choices. I want to have an impact on the political choices that have to be taken. To me, taking part in a forum is a sheer waste of time. I want to talk politics, not projects. I am not interested in the project itself but I do want to discuss with politicians the choices that lie ahead. [...] Many people want to take part in this forum so they can talk about their pet projects. Italy has become a ‘progettificio’ [a project factory]. [...] Behind any project there is always a political choice, and if I do not have the chance to steer that political choice, a project can always be expected to damage Romani interests. [...] If we had stuck to our guns and all disagreed about UNAR’s proposal, maybe the ‘National Strategy’ would be different now. This strategy basically validates the existence of these nomad camps and their management. What kind of projects could flourish from such a beginning? Only projects involving the management of nomad camps, which also implies a more flexible politics and State aid. That is why I say that the priority should be rather to influence the political choices. So it is more important to focus on ‘azioni di sistema’ (systemic actions). (Personal communication, June 26, 2012)
Final observations

Having analysed some of the main issues surrounding the implementation of the Italian ‘National Strategy’, the proposal by a member of the SCPPHR, Roberto Di Giovan Paolo, seemed Utopian. Launching *The Legal Status of Roma and Sinti in Italy*, he drew a potential parallel between the Romanies and the Sami people of Scandinavia. In a country such as Italy, where the Romani population is not even recognised as a historico-cultural minority, a parallel with a community boasting a separate Parliament and other independent institutions seemed far-fetched. Pledges made by some key institutional players in relation to the ‘National Strategy’ appeared to be still quite far from coming to fruition. UNAR member Pietro Vulpiani (2012), no less, stressed UNAR’s commitment to the promotion of equal dialogue between public agencies and Romani communities, who should finally be involved in the decision-making process. Analysis of the fieldwork interviews, though, showed that Romani peoples are still excluded from access to genuine power. On the other hand, Elsa Fornero, Minister of Labor, Social Policies and Gender Equality in the Monti cabinet, emphasised the need to abandon the emergency approach to make way for a long-term inclusion program. She pointed out the importance of creating a synergy between the various actors so as not to waste resources and to realise more concrete results (U Velto, 2012b). Nevertheless, an emergency approach was still promoted by the newly installed Monti administration. And resources are still being wasted.

Analysis of the Italian context during the ‘Emergenza Nomadi’ emphasises the dichotomous approach adopted by the Italian Government concerning the Romanies. The application of extraordinary measures, disproportionate to the real degree of any threat, was used to justify the suspension of democratic rules, the curtailment of human rights and disempowerment of the Romani peoples, leading to the broadening of socio-economic gaps between them and mainstream society. True, the ‘National Strategy’ was launched, but an official commitment to accelerate the inclusion of Romanies was not supported by any apparent intention to introduce real change. Both these actions thus contributed to reproducing and reinforcing a well-established condition of welfare dependency. A list of the most relevant events can clarify this point:

- Emergency decree no. 181/2007, better known as ‘Pacchetto Sicurezza’, is brought in by the left-wing Prodi Government.
- One year later, on May 21, 2008, a state of emergency is proclaimed by the right-wing Berlusconi Government.
• In February 2011 the SCPPHR officially criticised the ‘politica dei campi’ (camps policy).
• On November 4, 2011, the Council of State declares the ‘Nomad Emergency’ ‘unfounded and unsubstantiated’.
• On February 15, 2012, the newly installed Monti Government appeals against this ruling.
• On February 28, 2012, the Monti Government launches the ‘National Strategy’ with the goal of transcending the emergency phase.
• On May 9, 2012, the Council of State suspends the application of its own ruling from November 2011. Confusion replaces hope.

The president of Associazione 21 Luglio, Carlo Stasolla, saw all this as evidence of unresolved ambiguity:

Just like its predecessors, the new government’s policy was contradictory: at first it promised certain things, but later it did the complete opposite. This shows clear political continuity with the previous administrations. The shift from Left to Right changed nothing. This is particularly true when considering the city of Rome. There was no difference between the left-wing Rutelli and Veltroni administrations, and the new right-wing mayoralty under Alemanno. (Personal communication, April 4, 2012)

The gap between declarations of intent and actions to implement an innovative approach was there for all to see. Concepts such as ‘camps’, ‘emergency’ and ‘nomadism’ were roundly rejected by a number of official bodies, yet the Italian Government maintained a variety of interventions based on these discredited notions.

A year after the April 2011 European framework for Roma Integration Strategies, much remained to be done. Until then, in fact, member States had only done their duty in developing national strategies but, according to European Commission Vice-President Viviane Reding, of Luxembourg, this is not enough:

It is good news that Member States have delivered on their commitment and presented Roma integration strategies. Presenting national strategies is a first and important step, however, Member States now need to move up a gear and strengthen their efforts with more concrete measures, explicit targets, earmarked funding and sound monitoring and evaluation. We need more than strategies that exist on paper. We need tangible results
in national politics that improve the lives of Europe’s 10 to 12 million Roma. (As cited in Andor, 2012, paras 2-3)

It was the Roma Education Fund (2012) which identified the EU’s limited mandate for national projects as a weakness. The EU has basically no power over the way member States choose to implement their strategies. This aspect clearly emerged from analysis of the National Strategies conducted by the European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC) in March 2012. In its report, ERPC observed: ‘often no indication is given on how the implementation is ensured and that there is not enough information available in regard to the communication channels between both horizontal and vertical actors’ (p. 52). In addition, the fact that the role and mandate of the National Contact Points for Roma integration vary from country to country made defining their level of responsibilities and accountability especially problematic (p. 30). This means a national mechanism for enforcing the National Strategies was missing.

With regard to the Italian context, the EU platform can only support policy implementation and make recommendations, it has no control over UNAR. In turn, UNAR not only cannot guarantee, in both law and fact, the principles of independence and impartiality (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance [ECRI], 2012), but it has no power to inflict penalties and punish certain types of racist behaviour by private or public institutions. In other words, UNAR has no say in what the local or national Italian authorities decide. There is thus a clear gap between the theoretical framework and the concrete possibility of effecting a real change. The effectiveness and impact of the ‘National Strategy’ must depend on the political will at each level of government. At neither level have the powers-that-be really welcomed the involvement of Romani representatives.
CHAPTER V

The camp as a business: Inefficiencies, patronage, lack of transparency

Preceding chapters have analysed the Italian policy context. Chapter III retraced Italy’s history of locking up and segregating Romani communities in Italy. This aspect was essentially reinforced by the proclamation of a ‘State of Emergency’, as shown in Chapter IV. That chapter took a closer look at the actors involved in carrying out the ‘Piano Nomadi’ launched in 2009 when Gianni Alemanno was Mayor of Rome.

In this outline I have used material from the interviews conducted with privileged informants (CSO spokespersons, project co-ordinators, intercultural mediators, social workers and public servants). The following sections will first chronicle the diverse positioning of the main CSOs. Then, the interviews conducted with a number of civic bureaucrats will provide a useful perspective on how the Municipality of Rome operated. Third Sector organisations, while trying to improve the lot of the Romani peoples, ended up competing with one another, became self-referential and self-centred, and lost their original capacity to act as a ‘brake’ on the ‘camps system’.

What the political class refused was to introduce long-term policies, rather aiming to maintain the status quo in Romani communities. This chapter and the next, which analyses Romanies of the camps in more detail, will demonstrate how the ‘campo nomade’ as a socio-political construct became an arena where the power struggle among these agents conspired to entrench and reinvigorate a system of control, marginalisation and – though we can be fairly certain no one intended it – resistance.

A ‘Copernican Revolution’?

From Left to Right: The introduction of the CRI in camps’ management

The government’s decision to eliminate all left-wing associations from the ‘Romani platform’ in Rome, and more specifically from management of the camps, dated from May 2010 when the Municipality of Rome appointed a ‘Gruppo di Coordinamento e Garanzia del Piano Nomadi’ (Group for the Co-ordination and Protection of the Nomad Plan). This was introduced as an advisory body, composed exclusively of religious organisations and charged with the sensitive task of mediating between Romani representatives and local authorities (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2010). Seven months later, on December 15, 2010, an agreement
signed by Mayor Alemanno and CRI Special Commissioner Francesco Rocca (Comune di Roma, 2010), seemed to crown the shift from Left to Right in ‘camps business’ management.\(^\text{11}\)

Clough Marinaro and Daniele (2011) argued that the CRI’s involvement redefined the Romani issue as a ‘humanitarian problem’ (p. 621). An early manifestation of this paradigm shift had previously appeared with the founding of Castel Romani camp. Back in 2005, during the Veltroni administration, Protezione Civile (Civil Protection) – the national agency tasked with managing exceptional events – had been given responsibility for dealing with the Romanies in what was termed then a sort of ‘humanitarian emergency’ (Gruppo Attivo WWF Roma XI, 2005). What distinguished Alemmano’s approach, and that of his right-wing civic administration, was a willingness to strike direct agreements, with no publicity or tendering process, such considerations having been abandoned with enactment of the ‘state of emergency’.

Under these circumstances, Mayor Alemanno and Prefect of Rome Giuseppe Pecoraro were made joint special commissioners for the Romani ‘crisis’ – appointments that came with far-reaching extraordinary powers (Lunaria, 2011, p. 45). They tried to forge a new management model that involved only those organisations deemed controllable and compliant. Bodies that had devoted decades to working on Romani issues now found themselves suddenly on the outside (‘Protesta delle Associazioni’, 2011). Particularly over the previous decade and a half, centre-left administrations under Francesco Rutelli and Walter Veltroni had governed the city of Rome employing organisations that were politically aligned with them to work inside the ‘campi nomadi’. So this reversal of the political leanings of those on the ground should be considered part of a broader power struggle between rival political coalitions waged by the incoming right-wing administration.

The idea of transferring management of the camps to the CRI and a number of religious agencies was no accident. Just before becoming the CRI special commissioner, for instance, Francesco Rocca had headed up Mayor Alemanno’s social policy department (CRI, 2013). Rocca and Alemanno came from the same political alliance, the right-wing Alleanza Nazionale party. Furthermore, Rocca had a lengthy personal history of activism and managerial responsibility with a range of religious bodies: Caritas Diocesana di Roma and Associazione

\(^{11}\) As stated by Daniele (2011 a), the activities implemented for the social inclusion of the Romani peoples represented one of the biggest items of expenditure for the Municipality. Since 1991 Italian CSOs have been contracted to run a number of projects within the camps (cleaning and maintenance of the camp areas, the schooling of Roma children). The fact that more than two hundred workers are employed each year for the camp management and that the amount of the grant provided to the CSOs is about three million Euros per year (only for the schooling activities), transformed the inclusion of the Romani peoples into a lucrative business (p. 17).
Centro Astalli, for example, both members of the Group for the Co-ordination and Protection of the Nomad Plan (Falcioni, 2010b; Petrelli, 2008).

One reason in particular induced the CRI to join the ‘camps system’. Over the years CRI had incurred an enormous debt of some €90 million (Falcioni, 2010b). A TV documentary screened by Rai 3 channel in 2010 uncovered CRI’s scandalous track record in management (Giannini & Gabanelli, 2010). The ups and downs of the CRI were also extensively documented by Alberto Puliafito (2011) in a book entitled *Croce Rossa: Il Lato Oscuro della Virtù* (*Red Cross: The Dark Side of Virtue*). In it the author defined this once revered institution as a ‘monster with a noble visage’ (p. 16). Puliafito stressed the CRI’s anomalous use of concepts such as ‘impartiality’, ‘neutrality’ and ‘independence’, three of the movement’s seven guiding principles. At best it interpreted these principles inconsistently.

Poor management led to the CRI first being placed under the supervision of a ‘special commissioner’ in 1980. Such an extraordinary step is taken only in an emergency. Of all the Red Cross societies around the globe, Italy’s was unique in having to endure this radical intervention. The movement’s Geneva HQ issued strongly worded criticism of the Italian society (Forti, 2008). Even though the CRI has been under government control ever since, its executive management and staff (see reports of fieldwork interviews below) have continued to protest that the society remains neutral and independent.

Other circumstances have also placed the CRI in the spotlight. For many years, it was the only private organisation contracted by government to work inside detention and deportation centres, while, as one report noted, ‘other rights-based groups were frequently denied access to the facilities’ (Global Detention Project, 2009, p. 3). A series of rights violations arising from the treatment of detainees and the standard of living inside detention centres have drawn repeated criticism on the heads of the Italian government and CRI from ‘human rights organisations, the media and the CoE’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture’ (p. 3). Associazione 21 Luglio president Carlo Stasolla (as cited in Falcioni, 2010b) contends that announcement of the ‘*Piano Nomadi*’, which brought private security officers inside the camp walls, along with CRI workers, instantly reminded inmates of how ‘*campi nomadi*’ resembled ‘deportation centres’. In regard to the ‘*Emergenza Nomadi*’ itself, the CRI steadfastly backed the objectives of the Municipality of Rome, even before its role was made official. The CRI played various key roles in implementing the government’s strategy: using its own vehicles to forcibly remove Romanies from unauthorised camps to ‘equipped villages’ (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2010); and even carrying out the deeply controversial census that
mapped the Romani presence in the camps network (Open Society Foundations & Open Society Justice Initiative, 2010).

*Change of plan: The emergence of inefficiencies, overlaps and conflict*

Reaction against the Municipality of Rome’s policy was swift and unexpected. Rolling protests both by Third Sector organisations and groups of Romani activists forced a change of tack. Alemanno’s Third Sector critics attacked his new strategy for putting 200 social workers’ jobs at risk (‘Protesta delle Associazioni’, 2011; Roma Soc!al Pr!de, 2010). The Romanies accused him of ‘racialising’ policies affecting them and opposed the Mayor’s unilateral nomination of Najo Adzovic as his authorised liaison with them. Opposition came also from some of the religious entities Alemanno had tried to involve in his strategy. Caritas Roma was one of them. According to one of its representatives:

> We have always kept our distance from the government’s camps policy and decided to reject the offer to be part of the co-ordinating committee created by Alemanno. [...] The idea of using the Italian Red Cross to reorganise the camps system was unnecessary, especially considering his organisation had no previous experience in managing nomad camps. (Personal communication, June 11, 2012)

Faced with this crescendo of opposition, the municipality could not accomplish what Alemanno had defined, in a fit of exuberance back in 2008, as a ‘Copernican Revolution’ (Cosentino & Fico, 2012, para. 2). Overhauling the ‘camps system’ was no longer possible, and the Mayor was forced to negotiate and seek compromises with his critics (Daniele, 2011a).

Eventually, both the CRI and Third Sector organisations co-operated in restructuring the ‘campi nomadi’. The former was granted a supervisory role, which authorised it to co-ordinate and monitor the other organisations involved. The latter were contracted by the municipality to run an assortment of short-term (month-long) projects, which excluded them from any part in long-term strategy planning. They were left with almost no authority to make decisions.

In such circumstances, arguments began breaking out between the different organisations working in the camps. Conflicts broke out between all the organisations operating in the field. Disputes on how to handle Romani issues flared between the religious and secular associationists, recalled Sergio Giovagnoli, a former president of ARCI, one of the organisations that had spent years managing camps in Rome (Gruppo Intercultura CdB S.
Paolo, 2011). At the same time, different actors in the field grew confused as to expectations of their roles and responsibilities.

One concrete example of this confusion should be explanatory enough. Since the CRI had no prior experience in running camps, many of the personnel it hired to co-ordinate activities in the camps were from the very same Third Sector organisations that had been managing the camps before. Several social workers were simultaneously employed in the camps by the CRI and other non-profit organisations. So these social workers were both supervising lower ranks while themselves in the lower ranks being supervised – and earning double pay, a situation replete with conflicts of interest.

To recapitulate: under this new dispensation the Alemanno administration was contracting an external organisation, the CRI, to co-ordinate and monitor activities carried out by the Third Sector within the camps, thus delegating to a third party its own official duty to be in control. This inevitably created inefficiencies. Since the very beginning of his mandate, Alemanno had blamed leftist associationism for the disastrous results of the operations it had been running in the camps. This alleged failure of the non-profit sector should, rather, be perceived as a failure of the organs of state. In truth, they had never been able to manage a smooth and efficient relationship with the organisations to which they outsourced their work. On top of this, it should be noted that these municipal authorities have often found themselves struggling with issues beyond their control or responsibility. According to Cefisi (2011), it is the failure of education, housing and employment policies that causes criminal behaviour within Romani communities, not a failure to carry out operations in situations that are already fraught.

A report released by the VII Commissione Cultura, Scienza e Istruzione della Camera dei Deputati (7th Commission for Culture, Science and Education of the Chamber of Deputies12; 2011) concluded that the campaign for educational integration of the Romanies had been a failure: 'The Municipality of Rome in the last 15 years has allocated €2.5 million every year for the schooling of approximately 2,000 children. But until now the results have been unfortunately almost nil,' it noted (pp. 11-12). An argument could be mounted that one of the main reasons for the unsuccessful outcome of educational projects carried out by the government in partnership with the Third Sector lies in the existence of the camp itself and the policy of sending Romani peoples to these enclosures.

This conclusion also emerged from a recent study conducted by Associazione 21 Luglio (2011c). It focused on one of seven school bus lines used by the city council, through

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12 The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic are the two houses of the Italian bicameral system.
contracted CSOs, to transport Romani children to school and back to the camp where they live. The analysis of this specific case study places a particular emphasis on a raft of discomforts Romani children had to face as a consequence of their being part of this educational project. These are some of the common problems Romani children encounter in most of the ‘equipped villages’ around Rome: delayed start and distracting anticipation of exit from classes; the application of different standards for the evaluation of learning abilities; the existence of didactic gaps, often leading to episodes of marginalisation from the class; and the school’s inability to give adequate back-up to teachers who are often untrained or unsuited to the management of Romani children. All this produces psychological side effects as well, and inevitably affects how Romani students perceive schooling.

Concluding remarks

Every year significant sums are squandered in the management of the camps, and the great paradox is that the camps’ very existence nullifies efforts to further the social inclusion of Romanies. Why does the government keep promoting and funding an inclusion strategy based on exclusionary camps? Project manager for the Casa dei Diritti Sociali Alessandro Scassellati (CDS), one of the organisations working inside the camps, raised serious doubts about the Italian Government’s real motives when it comes to closing the gap between Romanies and mainstream society:

the concept of ‘nomad’ is used strategically in order to justify certain laws and enact a certain type of policy, whose aim is not actually to integrate but rather to cast individual Romanies as ‘others’ and marginalise them. This turns their situation into an urgent but temporary problem, which over time becomes an endless, insoluble question. This way it is possible to create and maintain a system which is capable of constantly generating money. The main aim is therefore not to solve the problem, but to keep it a problem. (Personal communication, December 22, 2011)

Eventually, this state of affairs ended up being adjudged a ‘disaster’ that required the deployment of ‘emergency’ measures. At the same time, as mentioned in Chapter I, it turned into a huge business which piqued the appetites of different entities, both private and public (Bonaccorsi & Vazzana, 2011).

The CRI has been in critical condition for the last three decades. Yet the CRI was called on to play a key role during the ‘Nomad Emergency’. The principal aim, as I have shown, was to
present it as a sort of ‘redemptive mission’ to undo damage wrought by previous wasteful administrations of the Left and exorcise the failures of the CSOs that worked for them. What was truly ironic was that a real emergency did exist: it had arisen in the financial and managerial conduct of the CRI itself. How could the government of Italy’s biggest city contract the CRI to manage the Romani issue, when it had no previous experience in this field and, more important, was already in receivership?

**Interview with CRI representatives in Rome**

On May 4, 2012, I conducted a focus-group session with the local committee of the CRI in Rome. The meeting was attended by the official spokesperson and six intercultural mediators and project co-ordinators in charge of the ‘villaggi attrezzati’ where the CRI was operating. Our meeting canvassed several issues concerning the ‘Piano Nomadi’, and four major themes were identified: Lack of transparency and an attitude of concealment; Strong belief in the neutrality and independence of the CRI; An over-optimistic view of CRI’s intervention; Conflict between CRI and other CSOs. The following subsections will outline each in turn.

*Lack of transparency and an attitude of concealment*

One of the main issues to emerge from the meeting concerned the CRI’s duty of confidentiality to its contracting party, the Municipality of Rome. This point was particularly emphasised by one of the participants. Every time ‘confidential’ information was about to be disclosed, either intentionally or unintentionally, the first interviewee (denoted as INT. 1 for our purposes) would stop the other participants from completing their statements, and remind them of their legally defined duties. This attitude prevented me from reaching a closer understanding of the rationale behind the CRI’s involvement in the ‘camps system’ and of its relationship with the city council. At the same time INT. 1 was monopolising information that ought to be treated as a matter of public interest.

Questions such as ‘What is the City Council’s response to your suggestions, as the [authorised] monitoring and co-ordinating body, regarding the problems inside the camps that need resolving?’, ‘Do you think the camps are run efficiently?’ and ‘What is your opinion of the policies, in particular the “Nomad Emergency”, announced by the city council with regard to the aim of including Romani peoples?’ went unanswered. Surprisingly, though, INT. 1 seemed willing to reformulate questions:
There is probably a misunderstanding. If you ask my opinion regarding the policies of the Municipality of Rome, this is something the CRI cannot and does not want to reply to. But if you ask me whether, since the ‘Piano Nomadi’ was introduced, conditions for the Romani peoples living in the camps have improved or worsened, this is another way of formulating the question. We can answer the latter, by saying that they have actually got worse, especially because the number of ‘camp dwellers’ has increased.

It felt like being part of a strategic game in which things could be said but only in very subtle and indirect ways. The plight of Romani communities in Italy constituted a matter of extreme importance, involving human rights abuses. Criticism was raised by European and international bodies against Italian officials. The focus-group participants all had extensive previous experience working for CSOs dealing with these selfsame issues. So it came as a surprise to see so much defensiveness. The situation appeared even more paradoxical when I reflected that the civic administration itself withheld detailed information on these issues. Its website includes no reports or any other information that might have allowed a better understanding of the ‘camps system’. In addition, most of the departments contacted did not reply to formal interview requests.

Strong belief in the neutrality and independence of the CRI

As part of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the CRI is dedicated to performing its duties according to seven fundamental principles which were adopted in 1965: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality (CRI, n.d.). Some of the questions raised at the meeting were deliberately formulated with the aim of acquiring a clearer understanding of how those principles – in particular neutrality and independence – were translated into practice in the camps.

As stated in its constitution, in order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature. The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement (IFRC, n.d.).

All participants expressed their acceptance of these values. They constantly referred to the fact that the CRI was a neutral and independent body whose main goal was to serve
whoever was in need, without distinction as to nationality, race or religious creed. INT. 2 repeatedly questioned my research focus on those two principles, as if his National Society’s adherence to them was beyond question.

My particular interest was driven by consideration of the following data, which do seem to undermine CRI’s commitment:

1. ‘The Italian Government contributes almost a third of Italian RC’s operating budget through contracts for the provision of services’ (Red Cross EU Office, 2013, Mission);
2. CRI is a voluntary relief movement, but it has around 5,000 public employees in its workforce (Giordana, 2008);
3. In 2008 a petition, signed by a number of influential intellectuals, was addressed to the President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, asking for the re-establishment of a real independent, neutral and voluntary organisation. The petition stated that the CRI had virtually become a public instrumentality, under the control of a bureaucratic and inefficient State;
4. Since 1980 the CRI has been managed by a special commissioner appointed by the government;
5. IFRC headquarters in Geneva has repeatedly requested the Italian society to address these anomalies (Forti, 2008).

Despite these data, all participants in the meeting asserted that their organisation was performing genuine and disinterested service, especially when compared with the other CSOs working in the camps.

According to INT. 3, for instance,

the main difference between CRI and the other organisations is that, before our intervention, camps were big business. CRI does not do it for money, since we are a voluntary organisation. CRI is actually taking a loss out of this. The fact that the other CSOs protested at being excluded shows that they were enjoying a hefty profit.

INT. 2 uttered a very similar remark: ‘We are neutral because we are independent both of politics and the Municipality of Rome: this is impossible for the CSOs since they are economically dependent on it.’ INT. 4 also reinforced this point: ‘We are not subject to any
type of conditioning. We get paid, but that’s another thing, because we provide a service to the city council.’ These statements were later contested by Carlo Stasolla, of Associazione 21 Luglio. Stasolla pointed to the CRI’s strong interest in the operation of the ‘camps system’. According to him,

the CRI has debts amounting to €50 million and is keen on calling for tenders. At the end of 2010, CRI signed an agreement with the Municipality of Rome aimed at securing a deal worth €4 million a year, to cover the management of all the camps. (Personal communication, May 6, 2012)

The impression received was that CRI employees interpreted ‘neutrality’ as requiring them to operate within the framework of the ‘Nomad Emergency’, just like other CSOs, but with the difference that they must avoid explicitly criticising the municipal administration. After all, Stasolla continued, ‘how could the CRI, which is de facto a government body, criticise the government?’ (Personal communication, May 6, 2012). The elasticity of the concept of ‘neutrality’ is even more evident when considering the position of particular CRI members. INT. 1, for instance, was working concurrently for CRI and one of the CSOs that CRI was supposed to co-ordinate and monitor. This was a matter the interviewee did not question, even if a conflict of interest became apparent.

An over-optimistic view of CRI’s intervention

In the course of the meeting, all participants appeared strongly aligned with the idea that replacing the other CSOs was essential. They all blamed these organisations for the Romanies’ parlous state. According to INT. 4, for instance, ‘the camp management carried out by the [other] CSOs had been a failure, especially with regard to the schooling of the Romani children’. That the CRI’s intervention had failed to deliver the predicted results mattered not, because the CRI’s efforts had been obstructed by the simultaneous presence of other CSOs within the camps. INT. 4 said the agreement the Italian society signed with the city council had not been completely respected:

the plan was that CRI would have been the only one in charge of co-ordinating all the camps. It is not possible that at any given time two organisations [the CRI and any CSO] can jointly co-ordinate. The [other] CSOs are obstructing the CRI’s work. According to our agreement with the city council, these organisations had to leave.
The CRI participants appeared to feel they were permitted to criticise CSOs, regardless of their obligation to neutrality, but they did want to mention the city council’s obligations. After all, it can be argued, the municipal authority had an official duty to monitor the performance of the organisations whose services it had contracted, and to ensure they met certain benchmarks. Therefore, the CSOs’ failure necessarily implicates City Hall, calling into question the effectiveness of its supervision.

A number of other institutional ‘roadblocks’ have also lessened the possibility of these organisations bringing about real change: among others, the lack of comprehensive national legislation covering Romani issues, the lack of cultural recognition, a tendency to classify Romani peoples as ‘nomads’, the constant sinking of public funds into the construction and operation of ‘ghetto camps’ rather than permanent housing, and a determination to deny Romanies all opportunity of making decisions for themselves. It is thus a dubious proposition that merely replacing the CSOs would have yielded valid and lasting solutions for the encamped Romani populations. If the Italian Government does not first address the specific limits of its legislative and cultural framework, all other measures are doomed to fail, and an emergency stance will be the only option.

All members of the focus group took pride in what they regarded as the positive impact their organisation had had on the Romani issue, on the basis that the CRI was a substantial servant of the public weal with more than a century of experience in aiding the victims of all manner of emergencies and calamities. They saw this new CRI mission as an advancement in their professional careers. They also felt that their job assignments were much easier to fulfil as part of the CRI than with whatever CSO they worked for previously.

INT. 1 emphasised that obtaining a ‘permesso di soggiorno’ (residency permit) for a Romani under his management was a much more rapid process when the request was presented by the CRI. There was general agreement this was mainly due to the fact that the CRI and Questura di Roma – the State Police department in charge of such applications – were both public bodies and could communicate via an internal channel. This sounded quite shocking, since both the CRI and other CSOs were working for the Municipality of Rome (and therefore in the public domain and offering a useful service to the public). Why then should an administrative request presented by the CRI be considered more urgent or important than one submitted by a CSO?
And yet, despite a generally favourable assessment of the CRI’s involvement in the ‘Nomad Emergency’, self-criticism did surface. INT. 4 confessed that things were not as good as he had expected:

I am sorry for those Romani peoples who thought things would have been different with the CRI in the driver’s seat. Things, as we know, turned out otherwise. The needs of this minority are only capable of a political solution.

INT. 1 also admitted that ‘the failure of the [other] CSOs was not completely their fault. That was mainly owing to a “systemic issue”.’ Some of the interviewees even disagreed with using the term ‘emergency’ for the authorities’ new policy. This was no trifling matter: it basically implied a repudiation of the main plank in the government’s ideologically driven scheme. It queried both the case for emergency action and the decision to replace CSOs already in the camps. If this was not an emergency, why was the CRI called out?

Conflict between CRI and other CSOs

Immediately after the CRI and other CSOs had signed up to the Alemanno administration’s scheme to manage the ‘campi nomadi’, relations between them became strained. Then in 2011 a series of public demonstrations by Third Sector organisations and Romanies (‘Protesta delle Associazioni’, 2011; ‘Scontro Sulla Croce Rossa’, 2011) forced the municipality to revisit its decision to replace all pre-existent CSOs with the CRI. Instead of taking their place, the CRI was now asked to assume oversight, a duty that by rights should have been within the city council’s remit. The situation in the camps became extremely confused. If Alemanno was seeking an improved model for camps management, this change of direction only ended up increasing inefficiencies.

The first obstacle the CRI had to face was unwillingness by the other CSOs to co-operate. Despite the CRI’s newly defined charter to monitor and co-ordinate them, these organisations refused to share with it the field data they had been collecting and accumulating for a decade. According to INT. 2, ‘theoretically we should have taken possession of that information, but then in practice the CSOs wouldn’t let us [have it]’. Since the CRI was without prior experience in managing ‘equipped villages’, this lack of collaboration and inaccessibility of data made it very difficult for its employees to attain their objectives.

A second obstacle for the CRI related to the coexistence of multiple organisations in the field and resultant confusion over the roles and responsibilities of each. This led to...
overlaps and mutual obstruction. It should be noted that the CRI itself has sometimes provided
the ammunition for conflict with the organisations it has been given the job of monitoring.

The ‘residency permit’ issue offers another example of a dysfunctional process. Since
the CRI’s role was merely supervisory, the other CSOs should have taken responsibility for
handling permit applications. CRI members, however, had also been forwarding these requests
in an effort to expedite responses from the authorities. The CRI virtually supplanted these
CSOs instead of merely overseeing how they conducted activities they had officially been
contracted to perform. In fact, one of the CRI’s job specifications was to make sure everyone
knew the limits of each other’s role. The following statement by INT. 1 ignored this point:

I am not interested in who is in charge of what; I am only interested in the living
conditions of these people. Even if the Third Sector was responsible for that, we felt we
had a right to intervene as the CRI to improve the situation of those living in camps and
we were successful. [...] It is of secondary importance why the State Police accept our
applications instead of those forwarded by the Third Sector.

Instead of dissipating confusion by clarifying roles and responsibilities, the CRI’s intervention
produced less dialogue and more uncertainty.

CSOs’ involvement within the ‘camps system’

A complex universe

This section analyses the role of Third Sector organisations in Rome’s ‘camps system’.
The fieldwork conducted in 2011-12 revealed a fragmented and internally diverse not-for-
profit constellation of organisations. This diversity can be ascribed to several factors: the public
agencies’ funding system and degree of dependence; political or religious affiliation; the
existence of a more or less professionalised structure. In the course of our interviews, the
representatives of these organisations often complained that the Romanies as a whole were
unkempt, disorganised and internally riven. Although Romani intellectuals have often
recognised these problematics, it was significant for the Third Sector to voice similar concerns.
Many of these organisations had become self-referential. They often had no or very little time
for Romani voices: their own interests and survival had become their main priorities. This
triggered mutual rivalries between those in the field. At times factions emerged within an CSO,
creating interpersonal schisms.
Opera Nomadi, for instance, was defunct by the time these interviews were carried out, at least on a national scale. Widespread dissatisfaction with the leadership of Massimo Converso, the organisation’s long-time national secretary, provoked a number of local branches to split from Opera Nomadi and start working independently. Its Milan section president, Maurizio Pagani, accused Converso and his Lazio branch of illegitimately continuing to parade themselves as national representatives (Bagnoli, 2010).

By contrast, some CSOs had been growing to such a degree that they had to set up new branches. This way they could better cope with new responsibilities or simply take advantage of some public subsidy or tax break. This was the case with Capodarco, which had spawned the Ermes social cooperative and, together with other associations, a larger entity called Consorzio Bastiani.

The complexity of the Third Sector in Rome was accentuated by the fact that it was not always easy to understand what strategic alliances had been forged between various ‘players’. Some were involved in running camps; some denounced the ‘camps system’ and the authorities and other organisations administering it; yet others preferred to remain officially neutral, though they were not necessarily inactive or entirely impartial.

Carlo Stasolla’s 2012 book examined Romani ‘inclusion’ under the right-wing Alemanno mayoralty. As pointed out in Chapter I, Stasolla described the strategy as a ‘business’ and quantified its market worth (at least €60 million) as well as its workforce (450). Also noted was what University of Verona professor of anthropology Leonardo Piasere had defined as ‘late modern anti-Gypsism’, a sentiment that manifested itself beneath the ‘noble visage’ of associationism. Vital to this policy is the segregation of Romanies in camps, on the pretext that it is for their own good. Yet, he observed in the preface of Stasolla’s book, the government was prepared to unmask its power when necessary. Piasere described associationism as ‘machinery’ that, to preserve its own members’ jobs, was coerced into supporting the government’s treatment of the Romani communities (Stasolla, pp. 7-8).

Whether Stasolla’s revenue estimate is correct or not, it is indubitably a huge business in which it is really hard to know exactly how funds are used (Cecchini, 2012). Rossi’s term ‘mercato della solidarietà’ (solidarity market), when referring to Third Sector activity in Italy (p. 219), aptly conveys the notion that the social sector’s stock is quite literally on the rise. As one Romani intellectual pointed out, ‘nobody is really interested in improving the conditions of these minority groups. Everyone considers us as a mere commodity’ (Nazzareno Guarnieri, personal communication, April 12, 2012). Meanwhile, conditions continue to deteriorate.
On the municipality’s ‘camps policy’, a division into three distinct attitudes can be discerned among Third Sector organisations: 1. Non-Romani CSOs involved in running authorised camps are in favour of them (‘pro-camps’); 2. Non-Romani lobby groups reject the camps outright (‘no-camps’); and 3. Catholic organisations display an ambivalence hovering between endorsement and rejection of the ‘Piano Nomadi’. The view of Romani individuals themselves (activists, intellectuals and ethnic-group representatives) will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Non-Romani CSOs working within the camps (‘pro-camps’)**

Together with the CRI, which was singled out by the Alemanno administration during the ‘Nomad Emergency’, other organisations were eventually contracted by the city council to work in the ‘Solidarity Villages’: Arci Solidarietà Lazio, Ermes Cooperativa Sociale, Eureka I Onlus and Casa dei Diritti Sociali FOCUS. Of these, the last-mentioned was alone in refusing to be involved in running the camps, but it agreed to manage schooling projects for Romani children. The other organisations were generally required to take on several extra responsibilities connected with supervision of the camps. Running the authorised camps entailed the following socio-educational tasks: transporting children to and from school; liaising between the children’s families and educational institutions; support activities within the schools (i.e., intercultural workshops, supplying teachers of Italian as a second language); encouraging the pupils’ parents to take responsibility for their attendance; and staffing help desks dispensing advice to the Romani inhabitants on health, legal and employment issues.

During interviews, representatives from the above-mentioned CSO quartet revealed their clear opposition to the government’s ‘camps policy’ and the enactment of emergency measures in dealing with the Romani issue. Their criticism of Mayor Alemanno’s Right administration was so pronounced that two of these CSOs had even joined a protest movement, ‘Social Pride’, in November 2010. They had three main complaints: first, the unclear role played by the CRI in the camps and the government’s attempt to replace all established CSOs; second, the municipality’s reduction of funds for social purposes while boosting expenditure on security surveillance; and, third, the introduction of short-term (month-long) contracts for CSO hirings, which made long-term planning impossible for them.

All the informants agreed that before Alemanno became mayor there was a better dialogue between CSOs and local administrations. But some things had not changed despite

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13 This grouping can be defined ‘Pro-Camp’ because, even if they all declare to be against the existence of ‘ghetto-camps’ for Romani peoples, they also define them as part of a necessary transitory stage. They do not reject the camp as strategy and embrace it as an ‘emergency’ tool.
the recent political shifts, they said. Previous administrations had ignored their proposed alternatives to the camps regime, as did the current one (They had wanted the exercise of ethnic politics replaced with inclusive programs tailored in broad terms for ‘disadvantaged people’, and argued that derelict urban spaces should be converted into new permanent housing plots.)

The interviewees evidently shared a philosophy which had three underlying assumptions:

1. They recognised the camps were a fact of life – albeit part of a municipal strategy, not an CSO initiative – and dealing with them was unavoidable. They were all against the recommendation of some organisations that they should boycott the camps policy and refuse to bid for management tenders. The interviewees reasoned that, even if every one of them refused to have anything to do with council’s politically driven plans, another individual or entity would have been found to fill the gap. The agreement Alemanno had reached with the CRI was cited as proof of the futility of boycotts.

2. They expressed willingness to hand control of the camps over to Romani organisations. Yet they also argued that Romanies lacked the requisite competencies and political maturity to take on this responsibility (yet).

3. They did not reject a priori the notional usefulness of camps – provided they were temporary (the first step in a wider process of inclusion for disadvantaged Romanies and non-Romanies alike). Left-wing ex-mayor Veltroni has postulated a three-step process of ‘hospitality’ for Romanies, in which camps have their place as a transitional home. In the first two stages new arrivals would be lodged in a camp and, after some time, helped by a multidisciplinary team to acclimatise to Italian society, including orientation exercises in accessing public services such as health care, employment assistance and education. The final stage would see Romanies occupying proper homes.

Although the ‘pro-camps’ bodies were working to predetermined guidelines and fixed job specifications, they all considered themselves completely independent from the city council. According to them, being contracted and paid by the authorities to roll out social inclusion projects for Romanies living in camps did not curb their freedom of action. City council could not tell them what to do or what not to do, they said: they had ample scope to explore best practices for improving conditions in the camps. Even so, they recognised that they could not have a big impact on Romanies’ lives in general. Their shortcomings were blamed on the
backwardness of Italy’s social sector and the government’s politics. The schooling project, for instance – one of the most controversial initiatives (VII Commissione Cultura, Scienza e Istruzione della Camera dei Deputati, 2011) – earned their tick of approval. The following comment, by one of the interviewees, acknowledges the CSOs’ achievements as well as their daily challenges:

We have been engaged in schooling Romanies and in advocacy for many years. When I started in 1995 only 30 [Romani] children were attending school in the city of Rome; today, more than 2,000 do. There is certainly a host of problems but the main one is that the Italian school system is imploding and incapable of serving everybody well. Our workers are not teachers, their role is not to replace them – and schools should have the resources to deal with the individual child. The question to be answered for us is not whether our work has been helpful or unhelpful, but whether things would have been the same without us. I doubt it. I think the education of Romani children is not as disastrous as it seems. Before we became involved, Romani kids did not go to school at all. Unfortunately the city council’s department of educational policy obstructs our work. They have this rule that we may enrol only one Romani kid per class. The message is that, above all, the school is short of resources, and second, the Romani kid is considered to be a problem a priori. This is very discriminatory. […] In this context, the decision to replace us with the Italian Red Cross in the camps was illegal according to Law 328/200014 and pointless. Besides, there was never a productive dialogue with them. The municipality should be duty-bound to support a useful exchange of views with everyone involved in the Romani issue, rather than being divisive towards them and ignoring their suggestions. (Personal communication, June 12, 2012)

Given these conditions, one could be pardoned for doubting whether CSOs could ever be completely independent, free to implement their own programs for the betterment of Romani life. Any project they may initiate would have been undermined from the start. Although they sponsored a fresh attempt to overcome the politics of the camps, in the end they came up

14 With the introduction of this Law, which is entitled Framework legislation for the realization of an integrated system of interventions and social services, voluntary organisations were recognized as official partners of local authorities for programming and implementing social assistance programmes. According to this law, the voluntary organisations registered in the regional registries can participate in calls for tenders issued by local authorities, becoming equal partners in case their application is successful. Consequently they also receive funds to implement projects that will benefit their communities (European Commission, n.d.).
against the intractable facts of the camps’ existence. These CSO representatives argued that their principal challenge for the future would be to unify the Third Sector so that it could counter the government’s decisions on an equal footing. But they also admitted that each organisation had a different agenda, with its own goals and interests. Disunity acted as a brake on progress. One of the interviewees concluded:

We all agree on certain issues but then it is hard to create a network capable of devising and applying a common long-term strategy. In the end we find ourselves co-operating with only those bodies whose ideas are similar to ours. (Personal communication, June 22, 2012)

**Non-Romani advocacy organisations rejecting the camps (‘no-camps’)**

On June 19, 2012, three of the four CSOs involved in the management of ‘authorised villages’ (Arci Solidarietà Lazio, Ermes Cooperativa Sociale and Eureka I Onlus) organised a public meeting under the banner of ‘Oltre il Campo’ (Beyond the Camp). Together with other speakers, they presented their reflections and experiences on the condition of Romanies living in Rome. On that occasion, Associazione 21 Luglio, Controcampo, Cooperativa Berenice, Fondazione Romani15 and Popica Onlus also made a contribution to the meeting: they sent an open letter to the event’s organisers, asking them to boycott the new the Barbuta ‘equipped village’, which was about to be inaugurated by the Alemanno administration (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2012b). Their letter stated that all ‘equipped villages’ should be considered ghettos and ‘the product of ethnic bias, the result of institutionalising segregation and discrimination’ (para. 4). They argued that social work projects could achieve nothing while all the things people valued – human rights, above all – were ‘suspended’.

In their view ‘camps’ offered no scope for personal improvement while they held no hope of release into the wider world. The provision of work inside the camps was dismissed as ‘a buttress for the local administration’s ghettoising and dehumanising politics’ (para. 5).

No mention of this letter was made during the entire conference, and the existence of alternatives to the ‘camps policy’ was also disregarded. What had been advertised as a ‘Tavola Rotonda’ (round table) – a setting in which one would normally expect some interaction

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15 Fondazione Romani is a non-profit organisation founded by a Romani intellectual, Nazzareno Guarnieri, with the goal of enhancing the condition of Romanies in Italy. Although the main goal of the foundation has to do with Romani issues, Guarnieri has intentionally decided to open it to Romani and non-Romani membership. He proudly defined his foundation as a multicultural organisation.
between participants and the audience – in the end looked more like a press conference. There were no questions and no answers, certainly no question-and-answer session.

Throughout the meeting the ‘pro-camps’ bodies spoke of their ‘best-practice’ work in encouraging Romanies to become self-sufficient. Their main goal was to chart a reliable career path for the camp’s inhabitants. The granting of ‘borse lavoro’ (paid traineeships) was held out as the passport to reach this destination, and one of the organisations’ biggest achievements.

Their ‘no-camps’ opponents disputed that claim, dismissing the traineeships as a huge failure. A recent study published by Associazione 21 Luglio (2012c) entitled ‘Lavoro Sparco’ (Dirty Job) purported to demonstrate how the ‘borse lavoro’ program was merely a scam, because it provided no genuine employment for Romani trainees who completed their apprenticeships. One of the participants defined the scheme’s lure as ‘fake jobs’ (personal communication, April 4, 2012). This research found evidence of ineptitude and corruption on the government’s part. But it also revealed a level of collusion by some of the delegates from Romani camps. Here follows a brief extract from the report:

‘sedicenti rappresentanti rom’ (alleged Romani leaders) have apparently facilitated the closedown and the relocation of formal and informal encampments, in exchange for a number of promises that local authorities gave them, mainly employment opportunities for members of their own communities. An important aspect of this system is the way fundings were allocated: The available money, which had to be used to recruit, [within ‘camp cleaning projects’], the Romanies living in the camps, were not subjected to any form of control enacted by the local administration. No criteria were requested regarding the employment of the Romani peoples or the results to be achieved.

(Associazione 21 Luglio, 2012c, p. 54)

In other words, deciding who could work and who could not was left to these ‘alleged Romani leaders’ own discretion (p. 46).

The screening of a documentary by Ermes Cooperativa Sociale showing conditions in Salone camp confirmed that the traineeships led jobseekers down a cul-de-sac. One video told the story of eight Romani individuals who had trained as tree surgeons. At the end of this project not one was hired by the company that had offered the training. Some were put to work on makeshift jobs inside the camp itself – cleaning the common areas or acting as ‘teacher’s aides’ in the camp’s crèche.
In a later interview, a representative of Ermes Cooperativa Sociale stressed the importance of restricting partnerships to companies that could hire Romani participants at the end of their four-month traineeships (personal communication, May 3, 2012). Traineeships did not mean real jobs for Romani people. The ‘no camps’ lobby identified AMA Roma S.p.A – a council-owned waste-management company – as one of these ‘fake jobs’ merchants, saying it had not employed anyone in the past 10 years. After this challenge to their approach, the representative of a ‘pro-camps’ organisation wondered aloud: Was it really possible to think of the camp as a ‘starting point’ for social inclusion? According to ‘no camps’ advocates, the notion of a camp being just a ‘transitory stage’ should be rejected because of the perverse momentum created whenever another camp was opened. Although camps were always being ‘sold’ as a temporary necessity, they had gradually become a permanent institution.

As for educating Romani children, special projects have been in place since 1992. After an initial experimental phase, the ‘Progetto di Scolarizzazione’ (Schooling Project) was given over to the city council’s XI Department in 1999, with a €2 million annual budget (Romano Lil, 2007a). At the same time, increasing amounts of public money were being devoted to a number of other services associated with the camps’ operation. During the introductory phase of the ‘Piano Nomadi’, the entire cost of running the ‘camps system’ almost doubled as compared with the Veltroni administration’s expenditure on camps in 2006.

Ultimately, while the ‘pro-camps’ lobby campaigns for more support, it is propping up a system that furthers marginalisation. It may be true, as one ‘pro-camps’ representative argued (personal communication, June 12, 2012), that ‘Third Sector organisations are the only ones willing to hire people who would otherwise not have access to the labour market’. But, as another ‘pro-camps’ delegate admitted, ‘There are examples of Romani individuals with jobs who stay on in their camp instead of looking for a different housing solution’ (personal communication, April 11, 2012).

In the words of a social worker from one ‘pro-camps’ organisation: ‘The existence of these official camps has become an incentive for Romani families to live there.’ This informant denied they were ‘mere victims’. ‘They stay because they know that they can live there for free’ (Personal communication, April 2, 2012).

Associazione 21 Luglio talked about the frustration of having its alternatives to forcing Romanies to live in camps ignored:

We calculate that a ‘camp dweller’ costs the council €450 to €500 a month. This means that €2,000 is spent on a family of four every month. With this much money any social
worker could help a Romani family find a better solution than a camp. The problem is
not a lack of resources: on the contrary, there are funds available. But there is no
political will to make a real change. We told the mayor: ‘Ten families could be picked out
of various camps in Rome and accommodated in regular houses for half the money you
spend. We cannot accept public funds,’ we said, ‘but we can mediate between you and
the cooperatives that can help you with that.’ The city council never replied. (Personal
communication, April 4, 2012)

Associazione 21 Luglio added that each camp should be treated on its own terms, with
solutions customised to the needs of the family involved, subject to available resources. For
instance, you might have a Sinto with a small merry-go-round and funfair business who would
prefer to live on a plot of land with his caravan, while other Romanies would choose to live in
an apartment block.

A similar opinion was also expressed by Nazzareno Guarnieri, the president of
Fondazione Romani. In December 2009 Guarnieri, while still leader of one of the biggest
federations of Romani groups, made the following proposal to the Municipality of Rome:

Firstly, you should stop hiring non-Romani CSO s to work in the camps. At one fell swoop
this would save the city council €13 million per annum. Secondly, with the money you
save, new public housing can be built. Then you can give 30 per cent of those houses to
the Romanies and 70 per cent to other disadvantaged people living in the capital.
Thirdly: during the preliminary stage, when people are relocated from a camp to a
proper house, we in the Romani Federation will take care of the camps at no expense to
the public and we will run them ourselves. (Personal communication, April 21, 2012)

Once again, the city council never replied.

Together with the public instrumentalities, Third Sector organisations are responsible
for turning ‘camps policy’ into reality. According to Guarnieri,

these organisations manage the camps, though it should be clear by now that they can
only ever be a graveyard for Romani culture. Nomad camps could be dismantled
tomorrow if everyone stopped working in them. [····] Many organisations would sooner
keep the Romani peoples on the margins of society. This way they can get funds for all
their ‘social inclusion’ projects, even though they do not really improve the lot of the
Romanies. [...] These organisations deal with Romani immigrants for only one reason: such interaction makes it easier to blackmail them. The fact there are still so many Romanies from former Yugoslavia (about 15,000) without documents amounts to extortion. Without documents, not only can these folk do nothing legally, but all the projects these ‘pro-camps’ bodies come up with are useless and meaningless. (Personal communication, April 21, 2012)

A representative of Associazione 21 Luglio reinforced what Guarneri had said:

All Third Sector organisations are very vulnerable and open to blackmail by the government: they have no clout, which explains why they’ve been unable to pressure the local authorities. You have to think of the ‘Piano Nomadi’ as a medium- to large-scale enterprise with 450 employees and €60 million in annual turnover. Business logic counts for more than human rights. ‘If you do not like it, I [the city council] can easily find somebody to replace you.’ That’s one of the reasons we are against camps. In a camp, even the best and most efficient organisation is powerless. And the city council is not interested in finding a different housing solution for Romani people. (Personal communication, April 4, 2012)

At the same time, Guarnieri recognised the responsibility Romani peoples had for themselves. Those living in camps have developed a welfare dependency and feelings of persecution.

Because they are Romanies, they now automatically think they are persecuted, so they have to be helped. There is this guy in Rome who has been working for years as part of the schooling projects one of these CSO’s carries out. His salary is around €900-€1,000. His wife also works, as a cleaner, she brings in another €500-€600. They both live in a nomad camp. One day I met him and asked: ‘Is not time you two found a little house of your own?’ He replied: ‘Are you crazy? How would I pay all the bills and the rest?’ I live on a monthly salary of €1,500 and he cannot get by with €1,600 euro? Many Romanies have no desire to leave the camp, because that way it is easier for them! They do not have to think about rent and bills etc. (Personal communication, April 21, 2012)
In conclusion, the ‘no-camps’ organisations looked on the ‘camps policy’ as a harmful strategy that ultimately worked against the ‘social inclusion’ of Romanies, even if that goal could only be defined in vague terms.

The Catholic organisations

In May 2010 Mayor Alemanno established a co-ordinating committee, the ‘Gruppo di Coordinamento e Garanzia’ (co-ordinating and protection group) and tasked it with ‘mediating between public institutions and Romani communities during implementation of the “Piano Nomadi”’ (Comune di Roma, 2011, p. 12). As reported in the ‘Piano Regolatore Sociale 2011-2015’ (Social Town Plan 2011-2015), this group planned to assemble all the voluntary organisations that had been dealing with Romani issues (Comune di Roma, 2011). Only Catholic organisations took part, and none of them had previously been involved in managing ‘campi nomadi’ (Bonaccorsi & Vazzana, 2011). As noted, the strategy of the incoming right-wing mayor was to replace all left-wing organisations with this Catholic network. Appointing Gianluigi De Palo, former president of Acli di Roma, to the position of Family, Education and Youth Officer in January 2011 was part of this plan. Acli, in fact, had an undisguised ambition ‘to be part of the nomad business and one day manage the schooling service’ (Bonaccorsi & Vazzana, 2011, para. 3).

During the preliminary stage of the ‘Piano Nomadi’ another large Catholic organisation, Comunità di S. Egidio, had joined the committee. But after a few months it abandoned its support for the council plan, for two main reasons: first, the closure of Casilino 900 camp; and, then, the forced removal of Romani families from Salone ‘equipped camp’ to the Asylum Seekers Centre in Castelnuovo di Porto (Frignani, 2012). Comunità S. Egidio complained not only that most of the transferees were Italian-born but at this action being taken without obtaining the concerned individuals’ consent. Of the 128 people forcibly transferred, 74 were minors who were had been enrolled in Salone schools. While S. Egidio was taking a strong position against Alemanno’s ‘Piano Nomadi’, fellow Catholic agencies – notably Centro Astalli and Compagnia delle Opere – reaffirmed their support. This bolstered co-operation between those organisations represented on the committee (Frignani, 2012).

One of the main consequences of including only Catholic organisations in the ‘Gruppo di Coordinamento e Garanzia’ was the creation of a certain tension between secular and

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16 The committee was composed of the following 11 Catholic organisations: Acli di Roma, Arciconfraternita del SS. Sacramento e San Trifone, Camminare Insieme, Caritas Diocesana di Roma, Centro Astalli, Centro Socio Educativo Interculturale San Giovanni Bosco, Compagnia delle Opere di Roma, Comunità della Riconciliazione, Gruppi del Volontariato Vincenziano, Gruppo Ercolini di Don Orione, Istituto di Medicina Solidale Onlus.
religious varieties of associationism (Stasolla, as cited in Castri & Aversano, 2011, p. 32). As argued by a representative of Arci Solidarietà Lazio, the existence of this committee itself constituted an act of discrimination. ‘The government should collaborate with everyone, instead of setting up selective networks,’ he noted (Personal communication, June 12, 2012).

In December 2010, a few months after the committee’s inception, the municipality and the CRI signed an agreement. As Stasolla observed, the democratic void created by the ‘Nomad Emergency’ had permitted the local administration to hand-pick only those organisations that would have applauded its politics. It basically eliminated any point to calling for tenders and the CRI was given full authority to hire the selected Catholic participants direct. After all, as Stasolla added, ‘in Rome it is possible to govern only with the Church’s blessing’ (Stasolla, C., as cited in Castri & Aversano, 2011, p. 32). Significantly, though, neither the CRI nor the Catholic committee members had prior experience of ‘campi nomadi’.

By analysing the interviews with some of the religious representatives (from Comunità di S. Egidio, Caritas Diocesana di Roma, Seminario Romano Maggiore and Fondazione Migrantes), a better understanding of perspectives on Romani issues in the national capital is attainable. First of all, these interviews showed how the Alemanno administration took advantage of the rivalry between religious and secular entities to revolutionise the city’s social-work sector. Secondly, they shone a light on divisions within the Catholic movement. In the end, it has to be acknowledged, the opposition of left-wing organisations, combined with existing disunity in the ranks of religious associationism, has prevented the city council from fully implementing its political project.

Ever since becoming mayor, Alemanno had accused his left-wing predecessors, together with their Third Sector allies, of wasting public funds (Di Blasi, 2010). In order to emphasize the lucrative approach carried out by the left-wing organisations, Alemanno strategically used the ‘noble visage’ of the Catholic bodies and the CRI, arguing that they based their work predominantly on voluntarism, charity and spirituality, rather than politics and profit.

Indeed, what emerged from these interviews with religious representatives was a strong sense of their spiritual mission and their nonpartisanship. This constituted a marked difference from the attitudes of the left-wing associations. The Comunità di S. Egidio stressed that it had always adamantly refused to be formally contracted to work in the ‘campi nomadi’ ‘on behalf of the city council:
Our commitment towards the Romani communities is based on voluntarism. We do not want to be paid for that. We want to have a disinterested relationship with them. [...] Unlike us, so-called pro-Romani organisations have agreed to work for the municipality so they have become pro-government and lost their claim to be independent parties.

(Personal communication, June 5, 2012)

A representative of Rome’s Caritas Diocesana voiced a similar view:

The problem for the Third Sector is that, once it started working for government, it sacrificed its independence. When the authorities pay you, you have to obey their rules. Besides, these private organisations’ only aim is to keep functioning rather than supporting true emancipation for Romani people. (Personal communication, June 11, 2012)

Even though the religious organisations liked to think of themselves as non-political, they did support the newly elected right-wing administration and its ‘Piano Nomadi’. Their presence in the ‘Gruppo di Coordinamento e Garanzia’ is a reminder of this support.

‘Pro-camps’ organisations responded by talking up the value of their professional skills, as opposed to the charity-based voluntarism typical of the religious bodies. As the spokesperson for Ermes Cooperativa Sociale pointed out, ‘The increasing need to offer new services to people in a number of “disadvantaged” categories required a more professionalised approach. Particularly in the past decade, the Third Sector has raised service standards substantially’ (Personal communication, May 3, 2012).

The Arci Solidarietà Lazio representative agreed: ‘The Third Sector is made up of people who have chosen a specific profession. Volunteerism and charity are both worthy things, but they have nothing to do with social work’ (Personal communication, June 12, 2012).

The ostensibly non-political approach of the religious bodies made them perfect partners for a right-wing administration out to transform the Third Sector’s involvement in its ‘camps policy’.

Two Catholic organisations maintained their independence within the framework of religious associationism – Comunità di S. Egidio and Caritas Diocesana di Roma. They jealously guarded their right to dissent from, and even openly criticise, the city council and its strategy. Eventually, they quit the committee. The Comunità di S. Egidio representative recalled:
We started meeting Romani peoples in the 1980s. Over the years we were publicly outspoken against Italian politicians’ contempt for this minority. We were especially scathing in the last 10 to 15 years. We deplored all emergency-style interventions by government. We stressed the importance of introducing long-term policies, particularly in education and housing. [...] The logic of the camp is a perverse mechanism and the clearest example of how Italian officials treat Romanies like people from another planet. (Personal communication, June 5, 2012)

The interviewee from Caritas Diocesana di Roma echoed this sentiment:

Public officials have no clue what really happens in this country, or about the individuals they are dealing with. They adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. [...] The attitude of Campidoglio [City Hall] has always been appalling: stubborn, reeking of cronyism and characterised by an emergency mindset. A bureaucracy has never been able to lead Third Sector work. Then again, the Third Sector never had a Gandhian figure who would say, ‘No, this is not the right thing to do! We are going to do things our way and we will pay the price if we are wrong’. (Personal communication, June 11, 2012)

An insight into the ‘Piano Nomadi’ and the role of the ‘Gruppo di Coordinamento e Garanzia’ was offered by a representative of Caritas Diocesana di Roma. He began by revealing why, eight months after the committee had been formed, council at last decided to sign an agreement with the CRI on responsibility for managing the camps:

At first the administration wanted to transfer management of the camps to the Catholic world – to S. Edigio and us, basically. We said we would not take responsibility for something we completely disagreed with. Instead, we asked the administration to promote real dialogue between all the parties involved. But, since the ‘Gruppo di Coordinamento e Garanzia’ would not accept that, we refused to be part of it. And that is why, in the end, the city council had to use the Italian Red Cross to execute its ‘Piano Nomadi’. Saying their left-wing predecessors were guilty of having done nothing in 20 years was just an excuse. That was a political calculation. (Personal communication, June 11, 2012)
This interviewee also highlighted a divergence of views between Catholic organisations when it came to the proper relations Catholics should entertain with secular authorities:

As part of the Church we are not supposed to do politics. [...] We can only tell the administration, ‘we disagree with your choices, and if you stay on this road we will quit this committee and the Church will keep its distance from you.’ When there is scope for collaboration, we say: ‘OK, we can do this, but you will have to do that.’ [...] In my opinion we have to draw the line somewhere. The Church’s problem is that it only allows an excessive mediation between different parties without taking a clear standpoint. I have taken part in a number of the committee meetings and always reminded the city council and other members about their main purpose: that is, coming up with inclusion strategies for Romani people. After I had made this point about 10 times, they told me that we at Caritas could no longer stay on the committee. We accepted that, and stopped attending its meetings. But we did tell the city council, ‘If we leave the committee in a more formal way, it could bring you down.’ [...] The committee was never dissolved but everyone was very critical of it and for months it did not meet. Nobody has ever really wanted to bring on a full-scale confrontation with the council. The only official departure was S. Egidio, and that was after eight months.

Unfortunately, within the Church there are all types, and I feel ashamed about that. We disagree with many organisations that use the ‘Church brand’ to serve their own interests. [...] This right-wing administration wants to give the impression that it is progressive and pro-Catholic. That is why they tried as hard as they could not to push the Church too far. When we say ‘We disagree with you’, it is a weapon we can use very subtly so that council refrains from doing something unacceptable. And sometimes we have succeeded in restraining them this way. But this does not mean the Church can really influence Alemanno’s political behaviour. (Personal communication, June 11, 2012)

In conclusion, it seems evident that Caritas Diocesana di Roma and the Comunità di S. Egidio remoulded Alemanno’s ‘Piano Nomadi’. Their disagreement, mostly conveyed in unofficial ways, forced the city council to modify its action plan. These two entities stood out against the other religious associations’ connivance with the municipal administration. It is difficult to understand where the boundary between the spiritual and political realms lies for those who collaborated.
The role played by public institutions

This section analyses interviews conducted with a number of bureaucrats directly involved in activating the ‘Piano Nomadi’. Administrators from these offices were interviewed: V Department, Nomads Office; XI Department, Education and Schooling Policy Office; XII Municipal Hall, Culture Office. The mayoral delegate with responsibility for Romani relations also agreed to an interview: his statements will be scrutinised in Chapter VI.

A formal interview request was also sent to the representatives of other city council departments: Deputy Mayor Sveva Belviso, an overall charge of the plan; Deputy Commander Antonio Di Maggio of the Municipal Police, responsible for public security and emergency actions; director of the V Department for Health and Social Services, Angelo Scozzafava; director of the Department of Economic Development, Training and Employment, Marcello Menichini; and the director of the Department of Schooling and Education, Giovanni Williams. None of these officials replied.

The information I did gather afforded me an insight into the functioning of the municipal administration, with particular focus on Romani issues. This insight includes the relation between public authority and contracted CSOs.

Although each of the interviewees dealt with different aspects of the ‘Piano Nomadi’, their professional experiences were linked by a common thread. All rejected the approach that councils governed by left- and right-wing coalitions had adopted. At the same time, a sense of frustration and helplessness pervaded their statements and attitudes. Transcending the realisation that they were powerless to reform the system, they were obligated to do things they did not agree with. They also felt constrained from freely expressing their views. In fact, the Alemanno administration had prohibited them from releasing information about their activities on this very issue. Before agreeing to be interviewed, they expressed concern about potential repercussions.

Each informant spoke forthrightly on the Romani issue: the administrative aspect of the ‘Piano Nomadi’; educational policy; the administration’s approach to the ‘equipped village’ of Tor De’ Cenci, situated in XII Municipal Hall. The overall message coming out of these interviews was of disconnection between administrative and political levels, with directions from one echelon routinely being ignored by staff at another level. With one eye on the voters, policymakers appeared determined to keep the Romani minorities marginalised by adopting short-sighted policies at the expense of more effective long-term ones which would have been potentially unpopular.
The website of city council’s V Department carries the following summary of the ‘Ufficio Nomadi’ (nomads office) activities:

The Nomads Office manages and co-ordinates activities at all the Solidarity Villages and Nomad Camps situated in the city of Rome. In particular, this office deals with the entry and release of individuals into and from the Solidarity Villages, while furnishing social assistance and administrative structures for the improvement of living conditions for the nomad population. The Nomads Office is also in charge of guaranteeing and maintaining basic hygiene in the camps and averting public health or security risks. (Comune di Roma, n.d.)

The interview with a representative of this office highlighted the gap between official commitments and outcomes. He argued that even if in the past, under administrations of the Left, the effectiveness of this office had been blunted by an authoritarian resort to forced evictions and ‘campisation’, implementing the ‘Nomad Plan’ would only accentuate this tendency.

One of the major problems emerged after the state of emergency had been declared, he confided. That announcement immediately deprived the Nomads Office of some of its already truncated authority. In effect, the new government policy approach added a parallel administrative channel and multiplied the workload of those individuals and organisations involved. Two parallel and non-communicating lines of authority had been created, the Nomads Office going off in one direction, with more or less the same functions as before; and a new, more senior administrative division, the ‘soggetto attuatore’, or plan implementation unit, moving in the opposite direction.

Apart from the deployment of multiple agencies working on Romani issues, this Nomads Office staff member confirmed that bringing in the CRI had produced administrative indecision. It was no longer clear who was responsible for what: ‘The security delegate would head off in one direction, the Municipal Police in another, the State Police in a third – and the city council, possessing two distinct and mutually annihilating souls, charged off in opposite directions at once. Everyone just went their own way’ (Personal communication, May 29, 2012).

As regards the contract agreed with the CSO s to work inside the camps, the role of the Nomads Office has always been marginal. All it was asked to provide were routine
administrative services like accounting, invoicing and scheduling meetings. Proclamation of a ‘Nomad Emergency’ reduced that role even further, since most of the ‘Piano Nomadi’ was now being directly administered by the ‘soggetto attuatore’. Henceforth the implementation unit would decide whether, where and under what terms to conduct a new camp (i.e. the Barbuta, the only one founded during Alemanno’s tenure), the number of houses to be built and who would be entitled to occupy them – and could decide all this and more without consulting the Nomads Office in advance. As a result, the Nomads Office would often be ignorant of what policy was being visited on Romani communities in the council’s name.

The municipality’s agreement giving the CRI a role inside the camps hacked away at the Nomads Office’s residual decision-making power. Indeed, the CRI was asked to control and co-ordinate the CSO’s, a task the Nomads Office has performed.

The interview emphasised the continuities between left- and right-wing local administrations. Politicised councils of both persuasions were lukewarm about going beyond the ‘camps policy’, which always blocked the door to real change. The interviewee argued that both administrations had been careless about: people living in illegal encampments being evicted without having anywhere else to go; camps being built despite mounting evidence that they soon became ghettos rather than paving the way for social inclusion; camps being built despite mounting evidence that they were ghettos in the making rather than conducive to social inclusion; the absence of any dialogue with the camps’ residents; and the persistent problem of statelessness.

At the same time, the informant, who had worked in both the Veltroni and Alemanno administrations, pointed out one important difference between the two. According to him, the Left could well have been described as more ‘proactive’, in the sense of less talk and more facts. Although the Left of the political spectrum has historically stood up for human rights, the left-wing mayor actually ordered more evictions, and built more camps, in Rome than his replacement in office. The Right banged the drum more loudly, but it was the Left that mastered the snares, diverting the attention of the media.

Probably the most astonishing aspect of this representative’s comments were his appreciation that the concepts ‘emergency’ and ‘nomad’ were central to the theory and practice of the ‘Piano Nomadi’:

In my opinion, at the very moment the city council decided to declare the state of emergency it basically created the emergency. I do not think there was a real emergency or any need for extraordinary measures before. I have never believed that. [...] The fact
that Romanies are still defined as ‘nomads’ is just an old habit. They are called ‘nomads’ even if they are actually better settled than many other people. One consequence of this caricature is that the moment you adopt the category ‘nomad’ you are ticking the box for social service needs as well. Besides, [...] I just wish that one day I will be able to say I work for the ‘Citizens Office’, rather than the Nomads Office. But in my experience I can tell you this will never happen. It is pure Utopia. (Personal communication, May 29, 2012)

In conclusion, the drive to better living conditions for Romanies did not appear to be an area of real concern for the power brokers on the city council. There were always other agendas.

The interviewee cited a couple of examples. The first concerned the ‘equipped camp’ of Tor De’ Cenci. According to him, Sveva Belviso, before being appointed deputy mayor, had used this camp for political purposes. In 2008 she won the elections in XII City Hall district, after basing most of her campaign on the demand it be shut down. Relocation of the Romani inhabitants was completed in September 2012, probably out of a desire to have it completed before June 2013’s council elections: ‘It was just a symbolic action so they could show their program produced concrete results. In reality, though, the closure of that camp caused the opening of another and the overpopulation of yet others’.

The second example was about the creation of a municipal anti-discrimination body. On October 22, 2009, council’s watchdog against prejudice-based actions – the ‘Osservatorio Cittadino Contro le Discriminazioni’ – was officially launched (Comune di Roma, 2009a). On this occasion, an agreement was signed between Alemanno and Equal Opportunities Minister Mara Carfagna. Despite the publicity, this watchdog never became operational. The informant argued that this was all driven by a well-attuned political judgment: ‘Various initiatives, not confined to the Romani issue, were initially advertised by Alemanno’s mayoral team but they were never realised. They should all be interpreted as nothing more than campaign tactics’.

These two cases were not isolated. This informant contrasted the administration’s ratification of several national and international conventions and treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, and its passivity in leaving what he termed its discriminatory policy against Romani communities untouched. At the same time, reports containing practical proposals to improve the lot of this minority group – reports that the contracted CSO s regularly forwarded to the Nomads Office – were never taken into serious consideration. In this interlocutor’s view, it was a question of a small ruling class with the power to influence
decision-making overshadowing all those below decks. It was a top-down relationship; there was no bottom-up exchange, he concluded.

**XI Department - Education and Schooling Policies**

The city council’s website offers scant information on the schooling of Romani children and adolescents in Rome. The available documents – a list of calls to tender, contractual terms and internal bulletins – were very difficult to find, often out of date and contained mainly technical information. None of these documents, except for a couple of short pamphlets, dealt with teaching methods, class assessments or budget information. All the material the city council was willing to deliver after a formal request amounted to a basic study of the extent of school integration among Romani children and a document on the monitoring of school attendance. In other words, a request for evidence that would allow a reasonable evaluation of the education Romani children were being offered by the State drew a response narrowly focused on only two parameters: the number of children enrolled, and attendance statistics collected monthly. This made it impossible to gauge with any accuracy the outcomes of various schooling projects initiated by the city council and carried out by its contracted CSO s.

On several occasions, the documents featured a foreword in which the administration would perfunctorily acknowledge its commitment to the promotion of cultural diversity and social inclusion for people of Romani heritage. This point was underscored by reference to council’s adoption of the principles proclaimed in the 1989 UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. The following is an excerpt from a document released by council’s XI Department on schooling activities between 2008 and 2011. It briefly summarises what objectives council has set for Romani children of school age and how it is envisaged those objectives will be achieved:

The city council, by adopting the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, confers special attention on the implementation of a program aiming at safeguarding the rights of children and adolescents. The cornerstone of this program is an assurance that all children and adolescents will have the chance to attend school on the [municipal] territory. At the same time, careful cultural planning will be carried out to guarantee that the highest standard of academic inclusion is provided, rather than merely temporary aid. [...] The city council intends to promote, and value, all initiatives aimed at integrating Romani children and adolescents into the schools of Rome. The goal of facilitating their regular attendance and school inclusion will be attained while avoiding congested situations where too many Romani children and adolescents are channelled
into just a few institutions. In this way any risk of ghettoising them will be averted. [...] The type of intervention that the city council intends to sub-contract will prioritise all those activities conducive to giving these children and adolescents the opportunity to get an education, to interact productively with the rest of society and to maximise their chances of a better future. (Comune di Roma, 2008, p. 3)

Despite these fine words, the city council appeared to chart a political course that took it in a different direction altogether. The fact that the official imperative was largely centred on housing the Romanies in camps, beyond the city ring road and far from regular schools, created a number of obstacles that clearly made it less likely children and teenagers would attain the above-mentioned goals.

It was the presence of these impediments that prompted the establishment of Romani-specific services (such as Solidarity Villages, schooling projects and transport services). During the interview with a representative of the Education and Schooling Policies Office, an awareness of the issues just mentioned clearly emerged. But, just as with the Nomads Office informant, a rather passive, even disenchanted, tone seemed to inform the planned activities. An awareness of the impossibility of implementing the reforms enunciated in the mayoral agenda led to less strenuous personal efforts to innovate. A feeling of impotence emerged, for instance, when I asked the interviewee whether she felt the creation and location of camp structures outside the city ring would push the Romanies into dependency on State aid. She replied:

Of course! This is one of the main consequences of that political choice. But we cannot do anything about it because we are just an administrative office. We do not take any political decisions. We can only execute the programs we are required to carry out. The current administration made choices, very similar to those of the previous mayors’ offices, which will worsen the situation of the Romani peoples. For instance, in a camp like Castel Romano, remote from the city and attended by more than 300 kids, you will never eliminate the need for a school bus service. What is more, the city council has even abandoned the public bus stop near the camp. [...] When the local administration decides to carry out forced evictions, do you think our office gets any notice? Well, we do not. What are the consequences? When Casilino 900 camp was shut down, the inhabitants were moved to Salone, and we had to introduce a cross-town bus service to let all the kids complete the schooling project they had embarked upon in schools near
Casilino 900. In this case, we did not stop the existing schooling project, in order to avoid starting a new learning activity in a new school. But these kids still ended up getting late to class. (Personal communication, May 19, 2012)

These are not the only impediments that have deprived Romani schoolchildren from the possibility of normally attending school. The major one probably stemmed from the decision to divide and disperse them in as many different schools as there were in the capital territory, permitting a maximum of two Romani enrolments per class, preferably one. The data contained in the *Social Town Plan 2011-2015 of the city of Rome: Interventions on behalf of the Romani peoples* – released by the city council in April 2011 – gives an idea of what result can be expected from this approach. According to this document the CSO’s Arci Solidarietà Lazio, Ermes Cooperativa Sociale, Eureka I Onlus and Casa dei Diritti Sociali FOCUS undertook to manage 16 encampments, including Solidarity Villages and authorised camps. These sites were located in 11 different municipal halls. Council contracted the transporting of Romani children to ATAC S.p.A., the municipality’s tramways and bus operator. This required the services of 33 bus lines. By April 2011, 1,788 children were enrolled in 300 schools. On average, there were 5.96 Romani kids per school (Comune di Roma, 2011, pp. 6-9). And 70 per cent of these children absolutely depend on these transport arrangements to get to school (Personal communication, July 20, 2012).

Although the initial purpose of the schooling project, as the interviewee argued, was to fight discrimination by providing equal opportunity to everyone, it actually created the basis for a ‘racialising’ intervention. In fact it raised the requirement for a number of *ad hoc* services specifically directed to Romani peoples. One of the enrolment plans was to avoid crowding all the Romani kids into schools near the camps, which would have produced ghettoisation and, eventually, drained the Italian children from those establishments to others with a lower concentration of foreign admissions. This tactical move, though, together with the ‘de-localisation’ of the camps in peripheral and isolated areas, made it necessary to start up a school transport service. [...] The city council invests €2 million a year into these schooling projects, but more than half that goes on transport instead of activities to promote school attendance, learning opportunities, extracurricular activities and individual educational projects. (Personal communication, May 19, 2012)
Another issue that emerged during the interview concerned the difficulty this department had in assessing students’ work for the purpose of long-term planning. The informant admitted that even the monitoring of school attendance was poorly executed. According to the available data,

more or less half of all the children enrolled have a mediocre attendance record; one-quarter of them low attendance and another quarter do not go to school at all. [...] The learning environment among the school population is generally very poor. But then the Romani children were surely the worst-prepared students. [...] This information was the result of a mere quantitative assessment carried out by an unpaid intern as a one-off exercise. At the moment, frankly, we lack the necessary resources for a more analytical inquiry. (Personal communication, May 19, 2012)

The availability of other monitoring practices, the informant went on to contend, would have compensated for the lack of a scientific approach. A qualitative analysis of the educational project was completely lacking, as confirmed by a study conducted by Massimiliano Fiorucci in 2010. According to this latter study, neither the assessment criteria nor the assignment tasks were made clear (p. 204). How can one press for social inclusion practices without the possibility of evaluation (p. 213)?

XII Municipal Hall - Cultural Office

My interview with the official from XII Municipal Hall provides an illuminating perspective on the city council’s attitude to a specific case study, the former ‘tolerated camp’ Tor De’ Cenci. In the city district where this site is located, the first Romanies settled way back in the 1950s. For a long time this encampment was characterised by illegal dwellings and it only became an ‘equipped camp’ in the first half of the 1990s, under left-winger Mayor Rutelli’s administration. A prolonged state of institutional neglect, though, has slowly turned the camp into a ‘garbage dump’, posing enormous health and safety hazards to residents of the camp. International human rights organisations and Italian civil society spokespersons have repeatedly raised concerns over the state of this camp (Grilli, 2011). Due to its deplorable conditions, it was downgraded to its old ‘tolerated camp’ status during rightist Mayor Alemanno’s time at City Hall17. This meant that according to the ‘Piano Nomadi’ Tor De’ Cenci

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17 In 2008, according to the ‘Terms of Contract Regarding the Schooling Project for Romani Children and Adolescents in the 3-Year Period 2008-2011’, the camp was still classified as an ‘equipped camp’ (Comune di Roma, 2008). Then, in 2011, the Social Town Plan 2011-2015 of the City of Rome:
camp had to be shut down and the land assigned to other purposes. So, all of its 400 inhabitants had to be moved to some of the 13 ‘authorised villages’ the city council had planned. These villages were either old camps that would have been renovated or ones just newly built (Comune di Roma, 2009b).

The recovery of this area was one of the major goals set by Deputy Mayor Belviso during her 2008 election campaign. According to president of the local ‘Comitato di Quartiere’ (Neighbourhood Committee) Guido Basso, Belviso actually won her seat in this municipal election by pledging to close the camp (Grilli, 2012). Despite her using this goal as a rallying cry on the campaign trail, the camp was closed only four years later, in September 2012 (Brogi, 2012). In the meantime, though, since Alemanno’s election, most of the services essential to running the camp were disrupted. The informant from XII Municipal Hall confirmed this account:

There has been a widespread lack of interest in the ‘Romani Question’ over the last four years. The only activity that has consistently received steady support from the city council is the educational project. That was carried out in this particular camp by the CSO Arci Solidarietà Lazio. Other initiatives have been also in place but, broadly speaking, they are run either by grassroots organisations or the individuals (be they social assistants, from CSO s or activists) who took the plight of this or that person or family to heart. In other words, these were not part of an all-encompassing social inclusion policy enacted by the local administration. Basically, what the government did on a national level with the launch of the ‘Emergenza Nomadi’ did nothing to improve the condition of the Romani peoples. Quite the contrary … (Personal communication, April 24, 2012)

The informant did not simply criticise the type of actions implemented by the government to overcome a situation of social emergency. He also challenged the rationale behind the extraordinary intervention itself. This measure was mainly based on the assumption that this population was ‘nomadic’ and that they represented a threat to national security. He pointed out a major anomaly:

Romani peoples were categorised into three different levels of transience, depending on how much time they were allowed to stay, up to a maximum of two years. The launch of

*Interventions on Behalf of the Romani Peoples* defined it as ‘non-equipped settlement’ (Comune di Roma, 2011).
the schooling project for the Romani children, though, was quite paradoxical. Its compulsoriness, in fact, implied that Romanies were basically required to reside in order to fulfil this duty, somehow disregarding their supposed nomadism. Over the years the ‘campi nomadi’ became permanent ghetto-like spaces where Romanies have totally lost their own identity. Today these people live in a sort of social limbo. They lost their own traditions and they did not develop new ones that could replace the old. They just internalised the worst aspects of mainstream Italian society. Besides, because there is no proper management of these camp areas and no dialogue with the Romani communities, these places have slowly turned into a heap of illegality, where certain Italian people are involved as well. Most of the Romanies in this camp (70 per cent) are drug dealers. Many want to stay there because there are no controls and they are free to carry on their illicit business. But it is the existence of the camp itself, the institutional neglect, the lack of real inclusion policies, which caused the development of these behaviours. (Personal communication, April 24, 2012)

An important feature revealed by the informant during the interview was the existence of an operational gap between the central authority and local administrative levels. In this case, although the site of Tor de’ Cenci camp fell under the jurisdiction of XII Municipal Hall, the local administrative office lacked the power to influence the management of this issue: ‘I cannot do anything to find the right solutions to the problems of those living in this place. This camp is a law unto itself. There are political reasons for that, and they are out of my control’ (Personal communication, April 24, 2012).

Particularly during the ‘Emergenza Nomadi’ period, everything was managed from the centre and no municipality could influence decision-making processes. For instance, the interviewee confessed that in four years he had never been invited to a meeting with anyone from the department his office depended on. He was at pains to point out that things were the same under the previous left-wing mayor: ‘Politicians were never interested in long-term strategies. It wouldn’t be profitable for them to invest in something that might bring positive results only in 20 years’ time. Their every action is focused on garnering as many votes as possible’ (Personal communication, April 24, 2012). He added:

All the residents of this camp are very skilled in recycling materials. They go around the city and look for recyclable items in garbage bins, on the streets. If the local administration were sincere about working with them to find the best solutions to this
problem, their recycling activity would have been legalised. Instead of introducing legislation that would create a whole new market, the city council keeps neglecting this issue because there are obviously no votes in it. (Personal communication, April 24, 2012)

The following issues, the informant noted, are some of the main barriers to the Romani peoples becoming fully accepted by, and integrated into, this host society: their sense of collective strength and opposition to mainstream values; lack of respect for their culture by the host culture; widespread corruption – as the host society regards it – among their own. This is the informant’s comment on Romanies’ cultural distance from Italians:

On the one hand the Romanies represent a ‘problem’ because they refuse to integrate. On the other, they were never offered a real shot at it. Rather, they have always been the object of attempts to force them to assimilate. For instance, their culture and language are still not officially recognised by the Italian legislative system. It is thus predictable that they will refuse to have a dialogue with a society that is violently hostile towards them. [...] Millions of euro have been spent on Romani issues. Unfortunately this was mainly used either to keep the camps policy alive or to carry out forced evictions. This approach is not intended to solve the problem but to move it somewhere else for a time. Two of the main projects supported by the government in Tor de’ Cenci – the ‘borse lavoro’ (paid traineeships) and ‘pulizia del campo’ (‘clean up the camp’) – were not designed to promote inclusion. Rather, they were bribes doled out to persuade the alleged ‘portavoce’ (spokesperson) for the camp to move from one place to another. Policymakers are afraid that by implementing good practices they might attract Romanies in their droves from the poorest parts of Europe. The nub of it is this: the main message the government wants to convey is that these people just will not integrate. This camp has been left to deteriorate to such an extent that its closure would become easier to justify. (Personal communication, April 24, 2012)

In conclusion, the testimony provided by this informant highlighted the corrupt management of the Tor de’ Cenci camp. The lack of interest in its inhabitants’ living conditions, together with a disastrous and unaccountable use of available resources, puts the blame squarely on the administration at various levels. Without a clear change of attitude from senior echelons,
who are more interested in harvesting a crop of electoral returns than in democratic accountability, it is unlikely the Romani residents are going to respond positively.

**Final observations**

Even though the ‘camps system’ was already in place when leftists Rutelli and Veltroni occupied the mayoral seat, its operation became even less transparent under their right-wing successor, Alemanno. The interviews conducted for this thesis have revealed the existence of a pyramidal hierarchy with top-down relationships connecting upper-level positions to lower-level positions at several points, but with no bottom-up exchange. In this context, the upper levels never received feedback from the lower ones.

One important difference between the right-wing civic administration and its left-wing predecessors was the communication channel that Alemanno established with the Romani ‘leaders’ in the camps. Using Najo Adzovic as his special liaison with the ‘camp dwellers’, the Mayor ostensibly endeavoured to establish direct dialogue with the Romani communities. As the Casa dei Diritti Sociali representative said:

> Paradoxically, Alemanno was better than Veltroni with regard to the Romani issue. For all its contradictions [Najo did not speak for the community, as many Romanies repeatedly pointed out: he would just say what the mayor wanted him to say], this was the very first time the public authorities in Rome had talked directly to Romani peoples, without the filter of associations or a cooperative. (Personal communication, April 2, 2012)

This chapter has exposed a democratic deficit in the way local authorities have operated during the past decade. Lack of transparency and accountability are the main issues. No independent bodies exist that can analyse the performance of tasks and functions within the Romani camps, let alone ones that can provide all the relevant information or arguments for projects involving the Romanies. The citizens, media, academics and civil society in general have no real knowledge of what has gone on. Very little light escapes from the vaults of this system and what information comes our way is often not rigorously scrutinised.

We can tell, though, that the administrative structures are ineffective and unable to deliver the services they are mandated to provide. The decision-making system about resource allocations and expenditures remains opaque. A formal process of both internal and external evaluation remains a lacuna in our understanding of the system, and corruption is evidently
widespread. Impartial and expert decision-making and policy implementation remain out of reach. A report released in 2012 by Transparency International linked Italy’s current economic crisis with administrative mismanagement. According to this study, Italy is ranked 69th out of 183 countries, one of the worst-performing EU countries on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, which measures perceptions of public sector corruption. [...] Italy’s public sector is weakest, with problems both in law and in practice including nepotism, lack of access to information and lack of oversight. (p. 1)

Public-sector inefficiency inevitably affects the Third Sector also, especially the organisations that are most dependent on state funds. According to Pavlovic (as cited in Conversazione, 2006), ‘some associations seem much too inclined to conciliate local authorities because of their funding dependency. The situation inside the camps is dramatic and there is a need for courageous initiatives [...] for an approach that goes beyond mere charity.’ (p. 32). Financial dependence on government places these organisations in what could be defined as ‘operational limbo’: they criticise the system but keep working for it. The Third Sector emerged in the 1980s as a subsidiary form of public welfare, and also as a way to overcome contradictions in the market economy (Messina, 2003). Over the years, though, it developed an ‘institutional organisational isomorphism’ (Lori, 2010). This has enabled the sector to survive, but at the expense of its constitutive principles (Barbetta, Cima & Zamaro, 2003; Zamaro, 2005). Loss of independence and a growing detachment from the needs of target groups and from its social mission ensued.

In other words, Third Sector chooses to work inside what many of the Romani ‘camp dwellers’ I interviewed have often likened to a ‘Nazi Lager’. This is line with the recent use of Agambian’s (1998) work on concentration camps made by some scholars and Third Sector practitioners. Today we would be critic with any organisation that more than 60 years ago supported Hitler and was involved in the running of the Nazi Lagers. Although the analogy is quite debatable, those interpretations of the ‘nomad camps’ should not make us feel unease with the idea of these organisations working in them? Third Sector organisations are thus not mere victims of short-sighted public policies; they also suffer from their own incapacity to become self-sustaining (Messina, 2003; Zamaro, 2005). Fundraising is a big issue for non-profit organisations today (Crescenzi, 2008, p. 2). If the social sector subscribes to an ethical code, how can they justify taking money from administrations that carry out forced evictions,
perpetuate these camps and violate human rights, instead of working for social inclusion? The sector is undoubtedly confronting an image and identity crisis (See Trasatti, 2009).
CHAPTER VI

*Between self-determination and ‘collective-identity closure’*

This chapter focuses on the experience of the Romani population in Rome and provides a new perspective on the ‘camps policy’. By using both Romani, as well as at times non-Romani, perspectives, it argues that the ‘camp’ should be seen not only as a tool of institutional control and segregation, and an incubator for criminal activity, violence and poverty, but also as an industrial-strength manufactory that can be relied on to churn out an odd assortment of products – self-ghettoisation, ‘collective-identity closure’, resistance, defiance of power and expression of agency. The camp, as a socio-political space where the actions and interests of different parties converge, has over the years become a system in which everyone is entangled, Romanies included.

Taking Foucault’s (1990) re-conceptualisation of power which, as he argued, should be ‘understood as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation’ (p. 92), Romani peoples, and their ‘Gadje’ antagonists are not presented here as part of a ‘powerful’/’powerless’ dichotomy, where actors are fixed and polarised in restrictive categories. Moreover, in opposition to the use made of Agamben’s (1998) and Goffman’s (1961) works in the conceptualisation of an encamped existence, this chapter disputes the concept of the camp as an ‘*istituzione totale*’ (total institution) (see Nicola, 2011) where Romanies are reduced to a ‘bare life’ (see Clough Marinaro 2009) upon which the state can inscribe its sovereign power without restriction. The relationship that emerges between the state, the CSOs and Romani residents is indeed complex and fluid. Although this relationship is shaped by an unequal struggle, the opposition between ‘rulers’ and ‘ruled’ gives rise to a cycle of power and resistance. In Foucault’s (1990) words, ‘Where there is power, there is resistance’ (p. 95). Together with it, power struggles exist also within and between Romani communities living in camps. Exploitation of the strongest over the weakest pushes a number of Romanies to accept the conditions of an encamped life as the lesser of two evils. In the camp, in fact, they can count at least on their extended families, while outside the camp they would not have real opportunities for social inclusion.
Disempowerment of the Romani communities

Paternalistic approaches and Romani voicelessness

The need to empower groups and communities in danger of being ‘left behind’ remains a critical issue, particularly with regard to Romanies. This difficult task is complicated by the fact that the Romanies constitute an internally diverse ethnic group, characterised by cultural fragmentation as well as factional rivalries. Over the years this became an obstacle to the creation of a movement that could be united around common social, cultural and political goals. This condition was often used by public authorities to justify adopting a paternalistic approach. In turn, ‘ventriloquism’ – stemming from a lack of political self-representation – instead of real empowerment strategies can partly explain the political disengagement of the Romani peoples.

A policy of education in community capacity-building, which would have enabled them to manage their own affairs and co-operate to foster and sustain positive changes (Howe & Cleary, 2001), was never seriously considered, let alone instituted. Non-Romani CSO’s should also be held to account for not upholding the Romani communities’ aspirations. The lack of internal cohesion was often misperceived as a ‘lack of maturity’ in politics and in the collective self-image they portrayed to the world, rather than as the natural consequence of national, cultural or socio-economic diversity (Sigona, 2009). Disunity among Romanies was thus used as a justification by Third Sector organisations for claiming the right to represent them.

According to Romani actress and activist Dijana Pavlovic (as cited in Cugusi, 2011),

No Romani individuals are enabled to speak up for their interests before the authorities. Civil administrations keep delegating Romani issues to the Third Sector and Catholic organisations, instead of Romani representatives. [...] Social workers have their own reasons for using a charitable approach to dealing with the Romanies. Many of them would be without jobs if there were no ‘Gypsies’ to take care of – not to mention that the European Union provides plenty of money for this purpose. Many Romani generations have been ‘managed’ (and damaged) by a charitable approach and welfare dependency. (para. 5)

As a consequence, interactions between the Romanies and the authorities or the Third Sector are more like a monologue than a dialogue. A similar claim is made by Professor of Romani Language and Culture at Chieti University and internationally renowned musician Santino Spinelli:
Millions of euro were wasted over the last 30 years, in the name and on behalf of Romani peoples. This created welfare dependency and segregation inside the camps, with inevitable consequences that are there for all the world to see today. (As cited in Associazione Thèm Romanó, 2010, para. 4)

Even the execution of potentially ground-breaking initiatives, such as Mayor Alemanno’s nomination of Najo Adzovic, a Romani, as his personal liaison with Rome’s Romani communities actually disempowered them and reduced their participation in politics. Adzovic’s nomination had no democratic legitimacy. He was not elected by the Romanies to represent them; he was chosen for reasons of political expediency. Addressing a rally in Rome on racial discrimination against Romanies in Europe in 2010, Spinelli noted:

The Romanies who participated in this event are free people. They do not accept being blackmailed like those living in Rome, who are forced against their will to follow orders issued by local authorities. The Mayor’s delegate, Najo Adzovic, a semi-literate foreign Romani with no work qualifications, was chosen by Alemanno as his spokesman. Alemanno chose a puppet as his special mouthpiece, a person who is easy to blackmail. Not only that: Najo has no global view on the situation of the Romani peoples, which transcends the context of this capital city. There is an international dimension to keep in mind, but Najo completely ignores that. Najo has claimed to represent the 7,000 Romanies now in Rome, but he should represent the whole Romani world, which is full of variety yet boasts many commonalities. Apparently, Mayor Alemanno decided that those Romanies [in Rome] are more worthy than the other 100,000 living in Italy. Most of the Romani peoples live in houses and are Italian citizens: they are honest workers but they have no representatives in the corridors of power. We asked Najo many times to consider how it is necessary to have a Permanent National Romani Council, made up of qualified experts, Romani intellectuals and delegates from Romani organisations and federations, to solve the problems besetting all Romani communities and not promote just the interests of a given group. But our request was ignored. (Associazione Thèm Romanó, 2010, para. 1)

The political disengagement of the Romanies residing in Rome diverted attention from the authorities’ and Third Sector’s inability to hold a constructive dialogue with them.
Repression of Romani elites

A problem that emerged while fostering Romani political representation was that Romanies are often actively discouraged from speaking up and saying what they think. In fact it is not uncommon for them to be expelled from organisations they were working for if they dare to oppose those bodies’ activities and strategies. This happened to Pavlovic herself. She was fired by Casa della Carità – a Milan-based religious foundation contracted by the local municipality to manage the ‘campo nomade’ at Via Triboniano – after spurning the ‘Patto di legalità e socialità’ (Pact for Legality and Sociality) adopted by the CSO as a ‘tool for cultural mediation and coexistence’ (Officina Genitori, n.d., para. 1). This ‘pact’ required Romani individuals to sign a pledge that they would be well-behaved, and not steal or beg. Pavlovic rejected the pact on the basis that it was really a kind of discriminatory ‘Gypsy law’ (‘legge speciale per gli Zingari’), a unilateral imposition rather than (as the word ‘pact’ would suggest) a voluntary agreement between two or more parties.

As the ODIHR reported in 2009, there were even ‘cases where a breach of the applicable rules in the camp by one Roma individual led to the expulsion of his or her whole family’ (p. 20). Pavlovic was fired when she joined a movement called ‘No Patto’ (No Pact) (Cugusi, 2011).

Similar cases of disempowerment were focused on the ‘campi nomadi’. These became the nub of a dispute involving two well-known Romani intellectuals, Spinelli (as cited on p. 3 of this chapter) and Nazzareno Guarnieri. Accused by Opera Nomadi, for which they then worked, of having produced misleading information about the organisation, they were forced to quit. The falling-out began back in September 2007, when Spinelli blamed supposedly ‘pro-rom’ (pro-Romani) organisations for the discrimination against Romanies in Italy. His criticism was directed mainly at Opera Nomadi which, according to him, had actually dreamt up and supported the ‘campi nomadi’ as a way to make money out of the Romani peoples (Romano Lil, 2007b; U Velto, 2007). Guarnieri, who was the president of Opera Nomadi in Abruzzo region, not only defended Spinelli but railed at the organisation’s national leadership, arguing for Romani self-determination. ‘You should all resign and hand over the reins of this organisation to Romanies,’ he concluded (Osservatorio Sociale Regionale, 2007, heading). Guarnieri also noted that the ‘camps’ were being exploited by ‘pseudo-voluntary organisations’ because they suited politicians’ purposes (para. 1). He further added that ‘the pro-Romani organisations claim the right to explain and decide on the future of the Romani peoples, but often argue for wrong-headed policies which end up damaging them’ (para. 1).
Shortly afterwards, Opera Nomadi’s national organisational structure collapsed, splitting into many local branches.

As Guarnieri stated,

nomad camps did not come into being by accident, but out of a precise political will. [...] Against this socio-political backdrop, some people started playing favourites. Their main concern was profit rather than the needs and wants of Romani people. Thirty years ago Opera Nomadi supported the ‘nomad camps policy’; today they criticise them. They are no longer credible. (As cited in Russo Spena, 2007, para. 3)

Many other CSO s lost their authority over the years, especially those contracted by the government to work inside the camps. Their interventions yielded very poor results, their relations with the authorities were often tense, and the ‘camps policy’ reduced Romanies to a state of permanent isolation and marginality as the notion receded of these camps being just a temporary haven.

As shown in the previous chapters, Romani individuals and communities were never given the chance to be fully included in Italian society. Yet a certain social and political awareness evolved within their ranks until some Romanies finally decided to act and to be more visible on the political scene. For example, the above-mentioned rally was attended by 1,800 people belonging to about 120 Romani and non-Romani organisations (Associazione Thém Romanó, 2010). The participation of Romanies in Italian politics is analysed in the succeeding sections.

The Romani movement

The proliferation of Romani organisations

Italy’s Romani communities have now been wracked by a decade of cultural and political turmoil. These convulsions have produced a veritable ‘explosion’ of Romani groupings all across the peninsula. In 2004, as Guarneri has observed, there were only three or four Romani organisations in all of Italy (U Velto, 2012b). Today, as estimated by Graziano Halilovic, president of Federazione Romani, one of three Romani federations, there are 87 or thereabouts (the precise number is unknowable because there is no dedicated register). Most are concentrated in the Lazio region and, more generally, in the biggest cities. The city of Rome alone can count 19 Romani organisations (U Velto, 2012b). At least initially, the Romani movement appeared to be the product of a political schism. Since the 1960s, Romani affairs
have been dominated by Opera Nomadi and the Associazione Italiana Zingari Oggi (AIZO), both pioneering Romani organisations. But, over time, internal dissent grew. This was principally stoked by influential Romanies such as Guarnieri and Spinelli, who increasingly questioned the value of the ‘pro-rom’ groups for which they had formerly been working.

What spurred this development, according to Yuri Del Bar, president of the Federazione Rom e Sinti Insieme, was Romanies’ realisation that as the most affected of all parties they needed to speak with their own voice, unmediated by ‘non-Romanies’. This was the only way to improve their situation and combat discrimination. Del Bar underscored the fact that all the federation’s constituent groups were made up of Romani individuals. To quote him, they were not there just ‘a fare il palo’ (to act as lookouts) (U Velho, 2012c, para. 2). This was a clear allusion to the systematic exploitation of Romani representatives by many CSO s. He had a point: a mere fraction of these CSO s’ staff are of Romani descent. Romanies typically hold lowly office in their hierarchies, the likes of ‘cultural liaison’ or ‘teacher’s aide’. Of the CSO s working on Romani issues, none was ever chaired or run by a Romani CEO. According to Spinelli, the prospect of Romanies creating their own organisations and giving voice to their own needs was one of the CSO s’ worst nightmares.

Using Guarnieri’s words, this was ‘una “rivoluzione” che fa paura’ (‘a threatening revolution’; Associazione Thêm Romanó, 2010, heading). But the proliferation of Romani organisations in Italy had some dark sides as well. In an interview, Guarnieri recounted some of the twists and turns of that process:

It was around 2003 that we started to get together and discuss what we could do to increase Romani self-representation. 2008 was the bumper year for new Romani groups in Italy. At that time I was one of the promoters of the Federazione Rom e Sinti Insieme, which comprised around 20 Roma and Sinti organisations. Our main goal was recognition of the Romani peoples as a ‘linguistic minority’. We also wanted to move from using intermediaries to this minority getting itself really actively involved. A year later, though, came the first big disagreement within the federation. Some of us believed that Romanies should be involved [as activists] regardless of how experienced they were, while others thought you should be more qualified to play a role. I was in the latter group. At the same time, many Romanies were being used as mere ‘stooges’ by others looking after their own interests. This situation gave rise to an internal split and a number of us dissenters formed the Federazione Romani. I was elected president. Three years after it was created, the federation had not attained its two main goals – getting
Romani peoples actively participating in matters affecting them, and establishing a promising dialogue with the authorities based on equal respect. Some Romani associations and individuals had not fully grasped the importance of personal training, cultural growth, a professionalised approach and education. So, after this experience, I decided to quit and go looking for new platforms from which to apply the values that had summed up my thinking from the word ‘go’. If you look at the evolution of the Romani movement, you will see that all the organisations founded after 2007 resulted from individual ambition and a determination to replace all the Gadje bodies rather than from a clearly thought-out political and cultural strategy. These bodies were completely egocentric, self-obsessed and lacking any internal democracy. Since all member organisations were ‘ego trips’ (each family having its own organisation), the federation reflected the self-centredness of each family. To put it another way, the federation did some good because it gave everyone a ‘slice of the cake’, but it did nothing to improve the Romanies’ lot overall. (Personal communication, April 21, 2012)

In May 2012, after quitting as president of the Federazione Romani, Guarnieri founded the Fondazione Romani. Guarnieri’s decision to leave ‘on his own’ spoke volumes about the current state of the Romani movement in Italy. Guarnieri, is well aware of this, saying: ‘Romani associationism is in great crisis at the moment.’ (U Velto, 2012b, para. 8). Other influential Romani, as well as non-Romani, intellectuals and activists have made similar observations, pointing out that many Romani organisations were set up pro tem, for the purpose of accessing government funds. Guarnieri was particularly critical of ‘certain Romani fringe groups’ he said were basically milking the ‘system’:

The problem is not just the ‘pro-Romani’ organisations that devote themselves to Romani business with the solitary aim of acquiring state funds. But it is time to say loud and clear that there also exist Romani organisations that exploit Romanies. We need to battle all these organisations. If we have been as one in criticising the ‘Gadje’ up till now, why should not we treat ourselves just the same? (Personal communication, June 26, 2012)

Romanian Romani intellectual Nicolae Gheorghe support Guarnieri’s stance. Recalling his visit to the authorised camp Tor De’ Cenci in June 2012, he remarked:
Combating prejudice must be a concern not only for mainstream society – through the DOSTA campaign\textsuperscript{18}, for example – but also for the Romani peoples. In my opinion, Romanies who exploit women and children are just as racist as other people. These people basically exploit others, while trading on certain ‘Gypsy’ stereotypes. [...] We in the Romani communities have to club together and strike back against attitudes like that. And at the same time, of course, we need to fight those who discriminate against Romanies. (Personal communication, July 21, 2012)

Stances such as those taken by Guarnieri or Gheorghe were important in understanding this key issue. Their contributions provide a privileged insight into the strategy adopted by the ‘Romanies of the camps’. Their views represent a clear break with the past, when Romanies were often depicted merely as victims. Guarnieri and Gheorghe are members of a nationally and internationally recognised avant-garde. They also remain fairly controversial, however, and are not widely accepted within their own communities, particularly among those involved in the ‘camps system’. Moreover, their deeds and words bring them into conflict with both the authorities and Third Sector CSOs.

\textit{Romani associationism in the city of Rome}

The weakness of Romani associationism

The difficult situation experienced by the Romani movement was clearly visible in the city of Rome during the period when I conducted the fieldwork for this thesis. My mapping activity, the attempt to locate and explore Romani associationism, immediately revealed the existence of several ‘ghost/fake’ organisations. Although it was possible to find online links to organisations founded by Romanies, most had ceased operating or were experiencing financial difficulties. Sometimes they had been in existence only briefly before disappearing without trace. Initially, some data were obtained from Roma Multietnica (Multi-ethnic Rome), a website dedicated to all the migrant communities living in the capital (Roma Multietnica, 2009). More data were gathered by interviewing key informants. The website Roma Multietnica was managed by the Servizio Intercultura delle Biblioteche di Roma Capitale (Intercultural Service of the City Libraries), which in turn depended on the city’s department of culture. Browsing this website, one could find a specific section relating to Romani

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\textsuperscript{18} ‘Dosta’ in Romani language means ‘enough’. Started in 2006 as part of a wider Council of Europe/European Commission Joint Programme (‘Equal Rights and Treatment for Roma in South Easter Europe’), the Dosta Campaign aimed at raising awareness on Romani issues. Its main goal was to bring ‘non-Roma closer to Roma citizens by breaking down the barriers caused by prejudices and stereotypes’ (CoE, 2008a, p. 2).
communities, with information assembled by the president of the local branch of Opera Nomadi, Massimo Converso. With few exceptions, the organisations listed on this web page were no longer operating. This was the case, for instance, with the Associazione Multiculturale Onlus Dromomania, founded in 2003 with the aim of promoting Romani musical traditions. The association’s contact numbers, as well as its website, were no longer active. Ditto the Sportello Sociale Lavoro Rom-Sinti, an information desk promoted by the Assessorato al Lavoro del Comune di Roma (the city’s department of labour), which passed on job advice and vacancies specifically for Romanies. Opera Nomadi was in charge of this service. This office had been launched in February 2005 (Archivio Romano Lil, 2006) but had been inactive since 2009 (Massimo Converso, personal communication, May 25, 2012). It was still being advertised by Roma Multietnica.

Two of the other organisations advertised on this website – Cooperativa Romanò Pijats and Cooperativa Baxtalò Drom Stireria Romanì – shared the same legal office address, weblink and contact numbers as the Sportello Sociale Lavoro Rom-Sinti. All three had been established with the support of Opera Nomadi but none could be reached. The main activity of Cooperativa Romanò Pijats was managing flea markets, scattered across several parts of city’s territory, where handmade products were traded, together with recycled items scavenged from garbage bins. According to Aleramo Virgili, spokesperson for the Lazio branch of the Rete Nazionale degli Operatori dell’Usato (National Network of Second-hand Goods Handlers), ‘As recently as 2012 tens of thousands of informal-sector garbage pickers were identified by the Municipal Police’ (Rete di Sostegno Mercatini Rom, 2012, para. 1). This activity represented the main source of food for many Romanies living in camps. Despite this, the government’s practice has always been to adopt measures to suppress it, rather than to consider the alternative of legalising it. Especially in recent years, after a short period of positive experimentation and openness, the local administration in Rome has put many of these scrap-metal scavengers or flea-market operators out of business. Some of the spaces previously allotted to this type of activity were eliminated. (Para. 2-3)

The Cooperativa Baxtalò Drom Stireria Romanì, a dry-cleaning cooperative founded in 2006 and staffed exclusively by Romani women, initially sparked great expectations that it heralded a new social inclusion model in a competitive job market. Due to the successive economic slump, however, it came close to shutting its doors for good in 2011, as reported by its
president in a video interview that went to air on May 25 that year. Ever since its inception, Baxtalò Drom had struggled to survive. And for the last four years this enterprise had stayed afloat thanks to just one client, a senior citizens’ day-care centre. This one contract had allowed a few Romani women to work part-time (Parisi, 2011). Another organisation experiencing similar difficulties was Antica Sartoria Rom, a Romani tailor’s shop also established with the aim of employing Romani women (Attanasio, 2012). Gauging the success of these cooperatives was really not possible: as pointed out by Associazione 21 Luglio (2012c), there were no available studies done at that time. It seemed likely, though, that all the co-ops were fending off collapse. As well as that, Romanies were traditionally associated with only certain types of activity: waste management for men, traditional textiles production or cleaning for women (pp.14-15).

It would be useful in this section to explain the role played by the municipality with regard to strengthening the Romani movement within the context of the ‘Piano Nomadi’ in Rome (see para. 4.2.2). Key Romani figures during the introduction of the ‘Nomad Plan’ were Najo Adzovic and Graziano Halilovic. In Sulla Pelle dei Rom: Il Piano Nomadi della Giunta Alemanno (On the Skin of the Romani Peoples: The Nomad Plan of the Alemanno Administration; 2012), Carlo Stasolla dedicated a specific section to both men. At the end of 2009, Halilovic willed into being a committee entitled ‘Coordinamento Rom a Roma’ (Coordination of the Romani Peoples in Rome), that included delegates from seven ‘authorised villages’ in Rome. The main task of this body was to function as special interlocutor to the Alemanno administration. It was only few months after the committee’s inception that it became inoperative due to internal conflicts between different factions, as well as a shortage of organisational skills (p. 54).

On July 27, 2010 Mayor Alemanno named Adzovic as his special liaison on Romani issues. Adzovic was tasked to develop studies, undertake research and devise projects for Romani socio-cultural inclusion, with particular reference to education, employment and intercultural mediation. On the very day Adzovic’s appointment was announced, a cooperative was founded by the name of Cooperativa Rom a Roma, which, in Adzovic’s own words, aspired to ‘offer jobs not only to the Romani peoples in Rome but, more broadly, to people from “disadvantaged” social categories’ (‘Un rom delegato di Alemanno,’ 2010, para. 5). The president of this new organisation was none other than Halilovic. Stasolla argued that, despite the fanfare surrounding this event, the cooperative made no real difference. According to him, it was just one more cooperative among many, battening on to the public purse while supposedly providing assistance to Romanies in the city (p. 56).
The interview with Najo Adzovic

Before assuming the status of mayoral liaison, Adzovic had been a resident of camp Casilino 900 and played a key role in the process that brought about its closure in 2010 in the context of the ‘Piano Nomadi’. In 2008 he was cultural liaison officer in the schooling project undertaken by Casa dei Diritti Sociali inside this informal encampment. But later he became one of the staunchest opponents of the CSO s that had been dealing with Romani issues. Adzovic had shown great political acumen during the process leading to the organised evacuation of his community from Casilino 900. It was this experience that made him a close acquaintance of Mayor Alemanno and nurtured a reciprocal trust. As Stasolla asserted (2012), Adzovic was the first Romani to embrace Alemanno’s new strategy in public. Two years after being appointed, he was still expressing satisfaction about all the results he had been able to achieve: ‘€600,000 was provided to the Romani cooperatives and this was a great success, because with the new administration Romanies became more and more the architects of their own future,’ he commented (as cited at p. 56).

This upbeat attitude, directed at both the ‘Piano Nomadi’ and the projects he appears to have been licensed to talk up, was again in evidence at the time of our interview. According to Adzovic, the municipality had invested substantially in setting up a number of Romani cooperatives within the camps. They were contracted to look after their own environment:

If you go into any of these camps, you will see that there are Romani organisations in charge of cleaning up the camp areas and of the socio-educational services. [...] With this administration we have tried to make the Romani peoples feel responsible for their own lives and given them guidelines on how to move out of the camps. In the last 20 to 30 years this had never been accomplished. Today Romani peoples have the chance to take part in meetings with City Hall, with the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor and the director of this department. Here they can discuss with them and plan the best strategies for getting out of the camps. This is a historic first. It never happened before with the do-gooders of the Left under Rutelli or Veltroni (Personal communication, April 16, 2012).

Personal attacks on Adzovic, as well as criticism of the activities he had already been engaged in, were already prominent at the beginning of his commission. But a year after his appointment the failure of his efforts was even more conspicuous. Ulderico Daniele (as cited in Stasolla, 2012) – a scholar of Romani issues whose specialty was Rome’s metropolitan area –
criticised the Coordinamento Rom a Roma, dismissing it as unrepresentative of the Romani population residing in the city: ‘None of its members were democratically elected and some of the largest communities, such as the Romanian one, did not participate in its meetings’ (p. 55). In the autumn of 2010 Guarnieri, at that time still president of Federazione Romani, deemed Adzovic’s statements and attitudes so damaging for Romanies that he forced him to resign from the federation (Stasolla, 2012). The Cooperativa Rom a Roma met with criticism as well. Like the Coordinamento, this cooperative was accused by Opera Nomadi of not being truly representative of the Romani communities in Rome and of acting only in the interests of a few families (Falcioni, 2010a, para. 18). It was the president of Cooperativa Rom a Roma, Halilovic, who had reported on the cooperative’s shortcomings: ‘Romanies seldom come to visit us, because we can only act as go-betweens, forwarding the requests we get to the department in charge’ (Stasolla, 2012; p. 56).

Significantly, Adzovic did not deny these critiques during our interview. At the beginning of the interview, his statements still reflected appreciation for the work conducted by the Alemanno administration during the ‘Piano Nomadi’ and his time in office. As we conversed, though, the internal contradictions of Rome’s Romani communities began to emerge:

The biggest problem inside the Romani communities is that we have no sense of unity. [...] I have promoted the creation of this Coordinamento, giving opportunity to all the Romani peoples in Rome, but we have been unable to find a common strategy to overcome the ‘camps’ [issues]. Every time I tried to bring them together they would only talk about their own problems: all they were interested in was their own business. There is not a single Romani who can say they were not allowed to talk with the administration. But lately our meetings have been suspended because I received several threats from certain members of the Romani communities. [...] If I chose to give jobs to five or six people in a camp, all the others would just say, ‘Why has Najo offered them a job? Why not us?’ The prevailing mindset within the Romani communities is mutual hatred. Neither I, nor the Mayor nor the prefect, can satisfy everyone. [...] Nevertheless, we, as management, provided many opportunities to several Romani co-ops and associations. These people took money from the city council, and guess what they did? They shoehorned members of their families into these cooperatives and basically created ‘their own little empires’. Can these people be considered real leaders of their own communities? No. [...] The projects we carried out [i.e., cleaning up the camp and
conferring paid traineeships] were a kind of education. But if we launch these experiments in the camps, and you are irresponsible and unable to take care of your own living environment, how can we be sure that tomorrow you will be responsible outside the camp? These co-ops today do not have the capacity to operate autonomously in the market. [...] There is still a long way to go but we, the Romani peoples, must avoid shutting ourselves away in our own communities. The problem is that there are people living in these camps who own cars worth €50,000 or €60,000 but they let their kids dirty in the middle of the street. Why do not these people rent a house and get out of the camps? There are hundreds of people like this. Almost 70 per cent of the Romani peoples you will find living in camps have a house.¹⁹ (Personal communication, April 16, 2012)

This interview revealed the weakness of the strategy adopted by Adzovic to empower the Romanies he was representing. It was not easy to see how the initiatives activated under his supervision improved their situation. No evidence of their success was proffered. It looked as though there was a large gap between the declared goals of increasing participation and accountability, and actual results. At the same time Adzovic’s statements showed how idle the administration had been when it came to tackling off-limits behaviour within the Romani camp-dwelling communities. Instead of promoting the introduction of a democratic model, from which all Romanies would have benefitted, however indirectly, Najo Adzovic, kept the old family-ruled system in place with the municipality’s backing.

Concluding remarks

The ‘explosion’ of Romani associationism during the past decade, especially in the city of Rome, did not result in a strong and united movement. Its leadership was not able to enunciate a long-term strategy to influence government policy on the Romani issue. On the contrary, the Romani ‘big tent’ appeared divided, disorganised and devoid of real political vision. The representative of CDS, an CSO working in the ‘campi nomadi’, surmised that this

¹⁹ Due to a lack of official data about this issue it is not possible to confirm the figure provided by the interviewee. However, a number of the informants interviewed within the camps revealed that they owned a house in their countries of origin. And yet, as Ca. (a Romanian Romani) argues, ‘living in the camp is better than going back home. Life in Romania is much harder and Romanians are very racists towards us’ (personal communication, April 11, 2012). In addition, during my previous experience as a social worker within ‘nomad camps’ I was often shown pictures of the properties owned by individuals living in camps. The fact that at times, a number of ‘camp dwellers’ would leave and return to their houses abroad for brief periods in order to attend some family business, reinforces this point. Most of my Romani informants confirmed that a number of Romani ‘camp dwellers’ invest the money they earn in Italy back in their home countries.
might also be due the fact that for years ‘we have been teaching them only the worse things about us, rather than the best’ (Personal communication, June 22, 2012).

A Caritas representative added that, as the ‘Italian associationism aimed merely to survive, rather than to liberate the Romani communities’ (personal communication, June 11, 2012), the Romanies had adopted the same philosophical approach. They were never offered the option of a genuine process of social inclusion. They basically extracted whatever good they could find in adversity. What they put into practice was the ‘art of survival’, as Najo Adzovic defined it (personal communication, April 16, 2012). According to him,

when you live in a camp, without documents and the real possibility to get out of there and to find a regular job, of course you have no other option than to learn to survive. And in such a context the strongest ones have a better chance to survive. They stop being preys and turn into predators. This is all a consequence of the existence of these camps, and politics is responsible for that. Inevitably, they also became an emergency issue (personal communication, May 14, 2012).

**Romani peoples as ‘fighters’ and ‘collective-identity closure’**

While an impressive body of literature on Romani life concentrates on the failures of Italian governments, the Third Sector has not yet been subjected to serious criticism. Besides, the ‘camps policy’ is seen exclusively as a means of social control, containment, segregation and forced re-education, a toll fit for a ‘total institution’ that leaves no room for Romanies to exercise their political talent and for an appraisal of their counter-strategies. It is thus crucial, as Sigona (2002) argued, to deconstruct the *problema Zingari* (the ‘Gypsy problem’) to analyse and reveal the range of components that make up the dynamic of such a seemingly ‘static’ problem. Romani individuals and communities themselves are among those components: they should be regarded as part of the problem as well, not simply passive victims. This aspect has been often underestimated or avoided. It should be conceded that the camp was not just a tool of oppression and exclusion but could better be described as a ‘battlefield’, a conflict zone – and not in a sense that would allow valid solutions to emerge, (as the ‘rules of war’ can sometimes serve as the scaffolding of peace), but rather as a place where ‘oppressor’ and ‘oppressed’ form and crystallise their own identities as homogeneous entities and a mirror of the other.

At this point it is important to take a closer look at the strategy adopted by the more ‘visible cohort’ of the Romani residents that have survived the camps. This is part of a co-
constitution of identity that has been proceeding for centuries. For the dominant, or mainstream, culture the ‘Other’, *par excellence*, is the ‘Zingaro’, the ‘Gypsy’, the ‘Traveller’, the Romani. For these people, the ‘Other’ corresponds to the ‘Gadje’, which in Romanes stands for ‘the whole non-Romani population’ (Italian and non-Italian indiscriminately). It is thus important not to neglect the persistence on both sides of a strong sense of belonging that is constantly being reproduced and reified. Especially since the 1970s, in the epoch of the ‘camps policy’, the ‘battle’ between ‘Zingari’ and ‘Gadje’ has become fixated on the ‘camp’ as a physical and socio-political space. Supporting a truly intercultural approach might be a policy that produces valuable dividends in future. Provided the basis exists for an equal two-way dialogue, an approach that rests on mutual understanding and learning could provide a solution to the impasse between two supposedly homogeneous and separate ‘worlds’ and worldviews.

**Romani separateness/distinctiveness**

‘Romanipen’ (Roma-being) as an isolated archipelago

For centuries Romani history has been characterised by oppression and persecution. Romanies have long been subjected to repressive government policies. These aimed either to keep them away from the rest of society or to eliminate them, be it culturally or physically. Through the former tactic, defining them as social outcasts led to their isolation and ghettoisation in specific areas or, as recorded in Romania since the 15th century, to their exploitation as an ‘economically valuable slave class’ (Woodcock, 2009, p. 2). The latter tactic set about eliminating them in the name of a ‘civilising mission’. This was enforced with a secondary aim of assimilating them to the dominant culture. In many cases elimination implied force, from forced expulsions to ‘ethnic cleansing’ and even systematic extermination, as occurred under the Nazi-Fascist regimes. Yet Romanies ‘have resisted assimilation and managed to maintain a strong identity’ (Silverman, 1995, p. 43), developing down the centuries an ideology that mirrors the one mobilised by non-Romanies.

The existence of this separateness between Romani communities and mainstream societies led Gheorghe and Acton (2001) to write about a ‘Gypsy “archipelago” ’ (p. 55). This expression evokes the diversity of various sub-groups and meta-groups, with their cultural, religious, linguistic and geographical affiliations. This diversity could explain why the leaders of Romani communities today are still striving to construct a coherent supranational Roma identity. As noted, conflicting interests, together with adverse policies in most national contexts, have so far prevented the creation of a unified movement at either a national or an
international level (Boscoboinik, 2009). Despite this great internal diversity, which bedevils Romani communities around the world, a unifying factor may be found in a binary opposition to the ‘Gadje world’. In Italy, for instance, the underlying rivalry between Roma and Sinti, the two major groups among the Romani population, was dispelled by a common attitude towards ‘Gadje’. They are the ‘Other’ par excellence, the enemy. In other words, the ‘Gadjikane’ dimension (being non-Romani) can be seen as the symbolic expression of a radical exclusion from ‘Romanipen’ (Roma-being), a category that unites all Romani peoples (Fischer, 2011; Kyuchukov & Hancock, 2010). As Pissacroia (1998) argued, the ‘Gadje people’ hold up a mirror to the Romanies’ own identity (p. 398), while constituting the main source of their sustenance (Benedetto, 2011).

The DNA of Romani distinctiveness is thus in the form of a double helix in which continuous internal negotiation among Romanies forms one strand, and interactions between Romanies and non-Romanes the other (Piasere, 2004). According to Benedetto (2011), ‘Gadjikane’ and ‘Romanipen’ display two contrasting poles reproduced through the sedimentation of prejudices cultivated by each group against the other. The picture that emerges from authors Asséo (1989), Piasere (2005) and Calabrò (2008) is a reminder that Romani peoples should not be regarded as voiceless and passive victims of hostile societies. On the contrary, Romanies always resist the dominant culture. Gheorghe referred to the Romanies of the camps in Rome as ‘fighters’ (personal communication, July 21, 2012). He was highlighting the fact that Romanies know how to take advantage of their marginal condition. According to him, they had learned to exploit old ‘Gypsy stereotypes’ in their personal interests, mainly as a way of obtaining welfare aid, while simultaneously blaming others: governments, CSOs, mainstream society. In many cases they were harming others, first and foremost members of their own communities. Of course, as Stasolla pointed out, ‘the condition of living in camps produces a perverse sub-culture. Anyone forced to experience the same type of social exclusion would respond in the same way’ (Personal communication, April 4, 2012).

Romanies’ resilience in the face of efforts to assimilate them has been an abiding theme with many variations. Carrasco (2011), for instance, used the concept of ‘warriors’ to underline the fact that for centuries the Romanies were able to resist the ‘colonisation of their way of life by any means necessary’ (para. 6). In 1989 Asséo coined the definition ‘peuples-Résistances’ (resistant peoples), which described how the Romani peoples resisted assimilation and mounted what she called an ‘internal counter-hegemony’. Through this mechanism, Asséo maintained, they had been able to entrench in perpetuity ‘the values peculiar to them to
ensure their own survival as a group’ (p. 124). Rivera (2003) posited, however, that a determination to resist was a sign of an isolationist and ethnocentric culture (see also Uzunova, 2010). Not surprisingly, Weber (1922, as cited in Pogány, 2012) had described the Romanies as ‘pariahs’, acknowledging that the enactment of ‘ritual segregation’ from mainstream society was ‘not necessarily, or exclusively, a function of discrimination by host communities [...] [but could] also result from, or be reinforced by, religious or cultural norms instituted or maintained by the minorities themselves’ (p. 377). Almost a century on, the concept of ‘pariah peoples’ as elaborated by Weber still ‘remains remarkably “modern” ’ (Pogány, 2012, p. 389), aiding our understanding of the reasons behind the persistent marginality of Romanies within an enlarged EU.

‘Romanipen’, ‘Romaniya’, ‘anti-Gadjé’, double personality

Weyrauch (1999) has observed that modern society is not regulated exclusively by the law. According to him, ‘a large body of unwritten law, based on oral legal traditions, coexists autonomously within any setting’. It is ‘supported by informal but effective sanctions’, he notes (p. 1211). The existence of such ‘unwritten laws’ has always played a role in governing individuals’ and groups’ behaviours. With particular regard to Romanies, probably the best expression of their creative ability to resist external interferences can be found in the ‘hidden world of Romaniya, or Gypsy law’ (Barnes, 2003, p. 823). Weyrauch (2001, as cited in Uzunova, 2010) argues that all Romani communities share a similar normative code, ‘an autonomous legal system, [...] which operates outside the parameters of state law’ (p. 294). Over time, the existence of this ‘invisible’ legal system among Romanies has reinforced and legitimised their perception of the ‘Gadjikane’ as an alien world. Calabrò (2008) even maintains that, for many Romanies, knowing ‘the rules of the dominant society [is important] the better to elude them and to capitalise on the opportunities that this can offer’. The ‘Gadjé’ is basically stereotyped as ‘a person who cannot be trusted and of whom it is only possible to ask and take as much as they can’, he concludes (p. 79). Obviously, the erection of neat boundaries between these two supposedly different ‘worlds’, which is constantly fuelled through the reciprocal attribution of negative bias, complicates the possibility of two peoples today finding a common ground for intercultural mediation and dialogue (Fiorucci, 2010).

Like normative ‘anti-Gypsism’, which developed within mainstream societies, an ‘anti-Gadjé’ attitude has been collectively nurtured by Romanies. These two opposing approaches are so deeply ingrained in both majority and minority groups that, as Uzunova (2010) argued, they could somehow be interpreted as commonly accepted social norms. And ‘because social
norms are arguably much more powerful factors in shaping the dynamics of a society than its written legal rules, this process is extremely important, especially in the area of human rights’ (p. 307). This point is of extreme importance. In fact, she asserts, the introduction of any ‘minority rights legal framework will be ineffective unless the nature of the social tension between Roma and non-Roma is first acknowledged and addressed’ (p. 286). To this day the refusal of non-ROMani societies, with their guiding principles and values, to consider the possibility that Romanies’ culture may not be inferior to theirs, plays a functional role in the cultural and economic survival strategy adopted by many Romani communities.

While the existence of a dualistic approach characterising the way Romanies relate with non-ROMani societies was clearly visible within the Romani communities I conducted fieldwork with – especially among the individuals living in the camps – according to Ulderico Daniele (2010) the Romani world and its rules operate like a parallel system whose functioning is secretly and scrupulously hidden from host societies. Daniele’s article, entitled ‘Zingari di Carta’ (Paper Gypsies), focuses particularly on recent works published by two of the leading Romani intellectuals and artists in Italy, the aforementioned Spinelli (2005) and Bruno Morelli (2006). Daniele’s aim was to analyse the type of narrative Spinelli and Morelli have used as part of their own empowerment. Spinelli notes:

Every member of the Romani population has basically developed a double personality: an ‘external’ one to be displayed in relation to Gadje peoples which is generally pitiful, submissive and reeking with victimhood; and an ‘internal’ one, based on pride, stainlessness and honour, which is deployed within one’s own community. These two personalities are diametrically opposed and incompatible, and are kept neatly separated in these distinct contexts. (As cited in Daniele, 2010, p. 69)

The strategy adopted by the Romani peoples was described by Morelli (2006, as cited in Daniele, 2010) as a ‘dualità di salvataggio’ (survival ambivalence). Ambivalence allows the Romanies to use a social (thought of as an artificial) mask to conceal and protect his or her real identity. When permanent settlement was not possible, though, the choice of a nomadic lifestyle was adopted as a way to escape repressive dominant societies. According to Morelli, nomadism was used as a form of cultural and economic resistance (p. 68). Both Spinelli and Morelli insist that the heterogeneity of the ‘Romani world’ should be seen as flowing from the capacity to adopt mimetic strategies to fit into, and survive inside, host societies. In the end, the combination of a mimetic approach and sustained separateness reinforces and
perpetuates the idea of the Romani and the ‘Gadje’ peoples as mutually antagonistic. Another factor should be considered, however, when seeking to comprehend the functional disconnection of Romanies from non-Romanies: ethnocentrism, the belief in one’s own society and rules as something pure.

This has been conveyed in the concepts of ‘vujo’ (pure) and ‘marime’ (impure), which constituted the basis of not only the ‘Romaniya’ (Barnes, 2003; Leeson, 2010; Weyrauch, 1999) but of Romani identity in general. According to Leeson (2010), any person who does not follow the ‘Romaniya’ rules for ensuring ritual purity would be treated as ‘marime’. As a consequence, non-‘Gypsies’, ‘who by definition do not follow these rules’, are in a constant and full-blown state of defilement. Gypsies look on them with contempt’ (p. 10). From a very early age, Romanies adopt various ritual devices, such as avoiding unnecessary contact with ‘Gadje’ and careful attention to bodily cleanliness so as not to be polluted and become ‘vujo’ (Daniele, 2010; Kyuchukov & Hancock, 2010). And yet, during the last half century, a decline of belief in the ‘marime’ concept has been discernible in several Romani societies (Leeson, 2010).

With respect to the differential degree of acceptance of Romani social structure, rules and traditions, Galati (2007) argues that it is possible to distinguish three main tendencies within Romani communities. There are Romanies who prefer to conform totally to the values their culture endorses. These Romanies will shun any form of relations with the ‘Gadje’ world (i.e. in education, employment, health) and its institutions, which implies that these individuals are often inevitably involved in criminal activity. Another group is composed of those who reject their own culture and identity, because basically they feel it is something to be ashamed of. Therefore, they choose to accept the host culture’s values and try to assimilate to them. Finally, there is a third group that, deploying what might be termed a ‘hybrid’ behaviour, critically assesses the values championed by both the Romanies and the host society.

Absence of a shared understanding of ‘Romaniness’

The categorisation previously suggested by Galati can be helpful because it introduces a new perspective to the understanding of intra-group co-operation, cultural identity and belonging. The remarkable heterogeneity of the Romani population throughout Europe should be regarded as an outcome of the pressure to conform emanating from the dominant culture, but also of the existence and proliferation of internal rivalries, as well as of a natural process of evolution and differentiation which over the centuries took place within Romani societies. The striving for unity and the idea of ethnic uniqueness promoted by Romani elites have been under constant challenge from the contemporaneous presence of widespread disunity within
Romani populations and the elusiveness of a shared understanding of ‘Romaniness’ (Boscoboinik, 2009; Fischer, 2011).

According to Barany (1998), for instance, ‘Romani communities are such that it is not clear what the Romani identity is, since many Roma do not consider themselves members of a cohesive ethnic group but identify instead with the subgroup to which they belong’ (p. 313). Internal heterogeneity thus constitutes a clear obstacle to the realisation of the utopian dream of creating a ‘Romani nation’, which has been advocated since the 1970s. The feasibility of this project has been also endangered, at different stages, by the difficult question of representativeness-cum-leadership. This emerged from the constant dialectic, or competition, between traditional communities, who commonly define themselves as the ‘real’ Romanies, and the modern, or more assimilated. The traditionalists would generally not cooperate with the non-traditionalists, whom they ‘mostly considered inferior’ (Council of Europe Romani Projekt, [ca 2005], p. 7).

This problem was clearly highlighted by Romani scholar Ian Hancock (2000a). At a number of World Romani congresses, Hancock had noted that on several occasions different Romani groups declared themselves ‘traditional’, each claiming for itself the mantle of legitimate representatives of what they defined as ‘our true people’. The statements by these groups aimed to highlight their opposition to those educated Romanies (the intellectual elite) who, according to Hancock, believed themselves to be ‘in a better position to bridge the links with the non-Romani world’ (para. 26).

In this regard, Gheorghe’s position was different. He argued (as cited in Van Baar, 2005) that ‘the relationship between the Romani elite(s) and the Romani grassroots [...] is to some extent debatable’ (p. 15). According to him, although the emergence of Romani elites had raised consciousness of the Romani question in global political circles, their becoming increasingly articulate had widened ‘the gap between them and their constituencies’ until ‘in many cases [it] proved to be unbridgeable’ (Vermeersch, 2001, p. 4). It is worth mentioning that in many circumstances these elites have played a key role in classifying Romanies as a distinctive ethnic group, probably underestimating (more or less consciously) the presence of significant internal differences. To this day, escalating internal conflict and greater cultural diversity among the Romani population has not delivered a system capable of promoting unity and dialogue. While Romani leaders laud the cause of strength through unity, many of them have to deal constantly with the contrary prospect. There are those who strive to inculcate internationalism in the Romani movement, and those leaning towards familism.
The key role of familism in Romani culture is elucidated by this observation from Matras ([ca 2007]): ‘Roma society is based around the group of close kin, which in most traditional Roma communities forms a single household’ (p.1). This relation is generally reinforced by the common practice of marrying within one’s own ethnic sub-group and the existence of extended families. Each sub-group aims to retain distinct cultural and linguistic practices, thus contributing to the growing heterogeneity within the Romani archipelago (Fischer, 2011). At the same time, ‘each Gypsy grouping tends to look upon itself as being the authentic [one]’ (Fraser, as cited in Pogány, 2004, p.14). Despite the absence of a unifying national sentiment, umbrella organisations such as the IRU (International Romani Union) keep ‘creating the framework of a Romani nation through top-down strategies of common-identity building’ (Fischer, 2011, p. 88). This happens although they are often self-appointed and most Romanies are unaware of the international political movement. It is thus ‘extremely difficult for Romani politicians and activists to establish a common platform within particular states’ (Pogány, 2004, p. 14). While Romani-related policies supporting integration have by now been introduced at a variety of institutional levels in many countries, their ‘practical implementation has been evaluated as ineffective or counterproductive’ (Van Baar, 2005, p. 2). Essentially, only a small elite has benefited from the campaign to emancipate the Romani peoples. As Boscoboinik (2009) has observed,

the development of the Roma elite increasingly deepens the gap between educated and engaged Roma on the one hand and the poor, average Roma on the other. The Roma leaders have been much criticised by the non-elite Roma and are sometimes characterised by ethno-careerism, following their own interests. (p. 187)

Basing his analysis on the work of the anthropologist Jonathan Friedman, Fosztó (2003) also identified the existence of dualism within the Romani movement. Pan-European or transnational projects supported by more global elites run counter to the priorities of emergent diaspora identities that place the accent on nationalism and national minorities, as advocated by more traditional elites (pp. 102-103). This opposition between ‘global elites’ and ‘diaspora elites’ is reflected at the constituency level also (Fosztó, 2003, p. 119). According to Fosztó, while an exemplar of the cosmopolitan elite ‘communicates easier among his/her fellows, and identifies more with elite members in similar positions’ (p. 119), as previously suggested by Hancock (2000a), lower-class Romanies tend to essentialise their positions (cut off from the dynamic of reflection about broader understandings of Romaniness), leading to
political fragmentation, economic competition and the ‘ethnicisation of poverty’ (Fosztó, 2003, p. 119).

Inevitably, the issue of political representation and legitimacy sharpens the focus on leadership within the Romani movement, as Petrova (2000) argues, since ‘whoever represents the Roma exerts power inside the Romani communities and therefore also in the outside world, and vice versa’ (para. 5). In turn, the struggle for power weakens the movement at an organisational level and at the Romani grassroots as well. This accounts for the familiar lack of transparency and democracy within Romani associations. According to Rostas (as cited in Rövid, 2011), ‘sources of funding, and details of the composition of their boards, are often not made public. The organisational structure, typically speaking, is extremely hierarchical, dominated by an authoritarian leader, who appoints family members or close friends’ (p. 116). Barany (2002) has described the phenomenon more bluntly, saying that most Romani associations were ‘poorly organised, [with members who] have serious difficulties getting along with each other, let alone working together – in large part because of intense competition for scarce resources – and remain ineffective’ (p. 209). The following section presents a few examples of this tendency.

**Case study: Castel Romano, ‘authorized village’**

The instance of Castel Romano, one of the camps where the CRI operated, can give a clearer picture of the confusion that surrounded the way ‘villaggi attrezzati’ (Solidarity Villages) were run.

**A brief background**

The ‘Solidarity Village’ of Castel Romano, previously listed as an authorised village under the ‘Nomad Plan’, was initially established in 2005 during the Veltroni mayoralty. In September that year 1000 Romanies who had been living for 20 years in an unauthorised encampment named Vicolo Savini, near the S. Paolo Basilica neighbourhood, were evicted and moved to Castel Romano. The camp was part of a larger strategy, the so-called Security Pact of Rome. The intention was to build four ‘mega campi’ (mega-camps) beyond the city ring road. Castel Romano, the only camp of this kind that the Veltroni administration managed to build, became a ‘model camp’ under his right-wing successor, Alemanno (Daniele, 2011b).

Closing down Vicolo Savini, then one of the largest camps in Europe, and transferring its inhabitants to Castel Romano was supposed to be a temporary solution. One report noted: ‘The Romanies had been promised the possibility of access to the public housing system or,
alternatively, financial assistance towards their repatriation’ (Gruppo Attivo WWF Roma XI, 2005, para. 3).

The camp was actually made of tents supplied by the Protezione Civile (Civil Protection). Less than a month later the city council made it clear the camp would remain in place until the coming winter. In a few weeks tents made way for ‘shipping’ containers: Castel Romano was now a permanent structure. At first, it accommodated mainly Romani Khorakhanè from Bosnia. Since 2010 it has also hosted many Serbian Romanies evicted from the former La Mortara camp. This has exacerbated the camp’s already critical overpopulation problem. At the end of its first year of existence, this entire operation had cost €10 million (Casalini & Pappacena, 2009).

Even if it was officially designated an ‘equipped village’, it was not a structure capable of accommodating almost 1000 residents.

Corruption, institutional neglect, inefficiencies and practices of resistance

The CRI functioned as an umbrella organisation co-ordinating all the CSO’s operating inside Castel Romano. Cooperativa 29 Giugno was in charge of managing the camp. Arci Solidarietà Lazio was responsible for the schooling of Romani children. Risorse per Roma took care of surveillance. According to the CRI members interviewed, the role played by Cooperativa 29 Giugno was particularly controversial. This is how one of them described its operation:

They do absolutely nothing in the camp! When people enter the office container to ask about something, they simply reply, ‘Fuck off, go away.’ This is how they deal with their constituents. When we pointed this situation out to the Municipality of Rome, nothing happened. Do you know why? Because, since Veltro’s time, the Cooperativa 29 Giugno is the owner of the land where the camp is, and the City of Rome owes them several million euro. That’s why the local administration allowed Cooperativa to manage the camp. It is a way to pay back the debt that the municipality accumulated over the years. Even when people die inside the camp nobody cares. All that matters is money. And, since this tract of land has been rezoned, in 10 to 15 years commercial properties will be allowed to go up here, maybe a shopping centre! That’s the real purpose behind the camp’s existence. (Personal communication, May 4, 2012)
An important documentary entitled ‘Gli Appaltati’ (‘The Outsourced’) was screened in November 2007, corroborating these claims (see Buono & Riccardi, 2007). An interview with one of my CRI informants also supports this representation.20

A number of other issues emerged during the interviews with CRI informants. The main one was probably the existence of widespread corruption. By approving the camp’s existence, the city council blocked any real hope its inhabitants may have had of achieving social inclusion. Inside the site, stronger Romani families learnt to take advantage of weaker ones. A CRI worker said that, ever since he could remember, there was a longer queue to enter the camp than to escape it. Although the great majority of its Romani inhabitants (between 60 per cent and 70 per cent) might have the chance to get out and rent a house or apartment, they preferred to stay (Personal communication, April 21, 2012).

A social worker explained why: ‘This is because inside the camp they have someone who can protect them. Everyone has a specific role in the camp, while outside they are just “Zingari” (Gypsies)’ (Personal communication, May 14, 2012).

In this context, an CSO -led social inclusion project became irrelevant. The camp has been completely neglected by local authorities. During the fieldwork for this thesis, litter lay scattered throughout the camp area. Time was when the city council assigned particular Romanies in each camp to muster hygiene patrols, not only for the sake of good sanitation but to give those residents some responsibility, even if it was just running ‘pseudo-cleaning projects’. In reality, said one social worker, ‘this is just a way for the government to buy agreement from the families who dominate the camp. Nobody can really guarantee the outcomes of these agreements’ (Ermes representative, personal communication, May 3, 2012).

Stasolla remarked how this approach had been taken up by mayoral administrations of the Left and Right:

The role of certain ‘Romani pseudo-representatives’, generally those who have been convicted of the most serious crimes, was to agree with the government’s decisions in

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20 In December 2014 a police inquiry, known as ‘Mafia Capitale’ (capital mafia), led to the arrest of the founder of Cooperativa 29 Giungo, Salvatore Buzzi. Already sentenced in the 1980s for murder, Buzzi had created one of the most powerful social cooperative in the city of Rome. He has been described as ‘the chief of an empire disguised as a cooperative which lived of the Gypsies and immigration business’ (Bechis, 2014, para. 1). The Tribunal in charge of examining the case has recently defined the position of Buzzi’s cooperative within the ‘calls for tenders’ system issued by local authorities as being monopolistic (Pacelli, 2015). A number of high profile member of the Alemanno administration were also arrested. Some of them had been part of the previous left-wing Mayor Veltroni as well. Alemanno himself is now under investigation (Angeli, Forgnone & Giannoli 2014).
return for money. These people today have so much power they can even decide who stays or leaves the camp. (Personal communication, April 4, 2012)

What is more, it has been known for these dominant figures to exert their power against CSOs operating in the camp. A representative of Arci Solidarietà Lazio confessed that ‘these people used to exact a monetary tribute from us, as if there was a sort of territorial logic behind it. At times some of our social workers were even assaulted’ (Personal communication, June 12, 2012).

For years, the government has basically allowed a corrupt system to survive and prosper. This tolerance has come about through a politics of absolute neglect and a policy of marginalising everyone. According to an employee of Municipio XII, the urban district where the camp is located:

the first decision taken by the city council after the new camp opened was to take the bus stop next to it out of service. This meant that those who did not own a car, and especially the elderly, could not go to the city or even the doctor. The only available bus service was provided by Cotral Spa [a council-controlled company] as part of the schooling project. From the camp it would only let on board the kids going to school. (Personal communication, April 24, 2012)

In connection with these practices, education – which would ordinarily be a crucial avenue to social inclusion – instead became instrumental in perpetuating exclusion. Romani students were not enrolled in the schools closest to the camp, in the city of Pomezia: they were transported to Rome [nearly 30 km to the north] where they would be dispersed across a number of establishments. No school would allow more than one Romani child per class. The distance separating the camp from these schools not only made a special bus service necessary, but also prevented the students from receiving regular schooling. Most of the Romani children were forced to wake up very early in the morning to get to school on time. But since each of the six buses provided for the schooling project had to drop pupils at several schools and was travelling on the Pontina motorway at peak hour, most of the kids would habitually arrive late at school. And then they would need to leave early. As a result, these children automatically ended up being perceived as ‘special kids’ by their classmates and teachers, as one of the informants confirmed (Personal communication, July 21, 2012). According to an employee of the city council’s XI Department which is the office in charge of
schooling projects, this state of affairs will never be eliminated so long as the camp, with all its organisational impediments, exists (Personal communication, May 19, 2012).

Much of the work conducted by the CRI in this camp, as well as much of the other CSO s’ work, was wasted. One of the CRI’s principal objectives since it received its official mandate was to create a network involving all the ‘stakeholders’. But, as the CRI informants admitted, several obstacles frustrated this plan. As well as the problems already highlighted, the CSO s contracted by the municipality refused to recognise the CRI’s presence and its overall management authority. For a long time, different stakeholders’ roles were ill-defined, and mutual interference became common practice. Certainly, the government’s intention of replacing all the CSO s with the CRI did nothing to make a productive collaboration likely. The CRI members also found themselves struggling with hostility emanating from Municipio XII. The main difficulty arose from the camp being perceived by the municipality and its inhabitants as an interloper in the neighbourhood.

To sum up: many years after the Romanies of Vicolo Savini were moved to Castel Romano, the residents are still in a state of extreme marginality but, if anything, worse off than before. One CRI member lamented, ‘From an urban context where at least they were close to public services (schools, hospitals, employment offices) to an existence without any of these services in their locality, these Romanies just grew out of control and became anti-social (Personal communication, April 21, 2012).

The camp as a ‘resistance site’

Chapter III sketched the history of how Romani peoples were physically marginalised in Italy’s ‘campi nomadi’. How the government attempted to realise its strategic aspirations was outlined in its successive stages, from the notion of using the camp as means of ‘protection’ for Romani culture, through to its evolution into a ‘system’ of social control and segregation. In this section, attention will be paid to the realities of these establishments mainly using the perspective of the Romanies themselves, examining how they managed to exercise what remained to them of their free agency. In this context, the camp is not to be seen merely as a physical space separating its inmates from the outside world, living without prospect of escaping into that world. Here, rather, that paradigm is inverted, allowing the camp to be seen as the concrete consequence of a decision autonomously arrived at, if not the outcome of an explicit strategy. Not the least of the paradoxes encountered in this exploration of the ‘camps policy’ is that the CSO s and camp-dwellers have the most surprising mixture of attitudes in common: both parties are critics of the ‘camps system’; yet both remain part of it.
The power to influence the preservation and perpetuation of this system is unequal, it must be admitted, but also it cannot be denied that both parties have become dependent on the system’s continuation for their survival. As noted, Nicolae Gheorghe visited Tor de’ Cenci camp in June 2012 and he came away from that visit scathing about what he had seen. Like a specialist who has been called in to identify a mystery infection, he diagnosed its condition as resulting from a ‘sclerosi del pensiero collettivo’ (a sclerosis of collective thinking). He was struck by the fact that some of the inmates owned houses back in their countries of origin yet they said with evident satisfaction, ‘We are nomads and we want to live in this camp, in our caravan. This is our habitat and we are integrated now in the neighbourhood’ (Personal communication, July 21, 2012).

Gheorghe was convinced that, having lived in ‘ghetto-camps’ for 30 to 40 years, many of these Romanies had developed an ‘immunity’ to social change:

In one sense it is impossible not to empathise with them. But, on further consideration, I found their statements were used as a way of defending the status quo, for not wanting to move out. It is basically in place a situation of immobility. […] There is a widespread culture of welfare dependency, even of victimhood. Paradoxically, their situation is so static that forced eviction might be the only innovation possible in their lives. (Personal communication, July 21, 2012)

Gheorghe’s description resonated with that of Stasolla, who explained that the Romanies of the camps and prison dwellers were in the same psychological condition. Presenting a written report entitled Anime Smarrite (Lost Souls) in February 2012, Stasolla used the expression ‘sindrome del carcerato’ (prisoner’s syndrome), arguing that when people have been imprisoned for a lengthy period of time, they become accustomed to living in a prison and afraid to go out (Personal communication, February 16, 2012). The Romani camp, he said, could justly be described as a ‘prigione a cielo aperto’ (an ‘open-air prison’). This is scarcely a far-fetched analogy. After all, prisons are built to prevent and punish crime, and the State has declared Romani peoples, in effect, a security threat from which the general population must be quarantined by confining the source of this threat to zones of control.

Another study conducted by Associazione 21 Luglio (2012a) described the psychological and social effects of evictions from the Casilino 900 informal camp, noting that its inhabitants found themselves living in a sort of ‘spatial and temporal suspension’ (p. 45). This condition was described as an imposed ‘in-betweenness’ resulting from the authorities’
violating their promises of social inclusion made to the Romani camp-dwellers. Meanwhile, the residents found themselves tossed between the saddening recollections of being evicted and uncertainty about their future, not knowing when decent housing might become available to them. This research exercise also discovered that participants had developed the following psychological disturbances: apathy, disorientation, marginality, depression, anxiety and panic.

As noted, however, not all the fallout of the State’s ‘camps policy’ was detrimental. There is more to the tale than declining mental and physical health, psychological passivity and physical immobility. On the contrary, Romanies have responded and found certain social and economic benefits can flow from ‘campisation’. Many have grown more skilled in what Adzovic has defined as ‘arte della sopravvivenza’ (the art of survival), a contest in which the conventional wisdom is that only the strongest will prevail. To quote Adzovic:

Because of the camp, the Romani communities developed a system in which people are not merely prey but become predators too. Government politics can take credit for that. Romanies are just placed in a ‘shipping’ container and left to their destiny. Without consultation, necessity dictates every act. Under these circumstances Romanies have to battle on all fronts to succeed. (Personal communication, May 14, 2012)

Gheorghe poses the question, ‘How can they live like this?’ And he has worked out the answer: ‘Like any human being, they simply try to maximise their personal interests’ (Personal communication, July 21, 2012).

It is reasonable to infer that the ‘visible Romanies’ or ‘Romanies of the camps’ have been acting out a ‘fake/stereotypical’ representation of what Romani culture is. They have employed old clichés to paint an abstract portrait of their culture, in the process undergoing ‘re-Tziganisation’. This was prompted partly by the ‘camps policy’ and the tendency to categorise all Romani peoples as ‘nomads’. But it was also produced by the Romanies themselves who have internalised the external logic and learned to go with it.

During a follow-up meeting to discuss his visit to Tor De’ Cenci camp, Gheorghe said:

It is commonly believed that Romani peoples are the victims of racism and persecution. Yes, they are victims, but they are also fighters. [...] I saw people in Romania, during Communism, hundreds of thousands of people of Romani origin, who worked in construction and other industries, received apartments, paid taxes, got 20-year loans from banks. [...] But after the fall of Communism some people from those communities
sold their apartments and re-entered a Romani ghetto in Romania or went to Italy to live in camps, becoming ‘Zingari’ again inside those camps. I saw these people acting out the Romani stereotype, living among rubbish and rats, exploiting their children. This is a form of ‘re-Tziganisation’, a symbolic exploitation of the ‘Zingaro’ stereotype. I am worried about these individual cases. There are not many but they are highly conspicuous. And, because of them, the stereotype continues, larger than life, while society, the political parties and the racists get the blame. But these people are also responsible for this situation. (Personal communication, July 21, 2012)

Another result of the ‘camps policy’ was highlighted by Stasolla and Brazzoduro. With some slight differences, they both branded the culture of camp-dwellers a ‘cultura del sottoproletariato’ (culture of the lumpenproletariat). According to Stasolla, the people who live in camps are no longer Romanies. They have become part of the urban underclasses. They lost their culture in the cultural genocide unleashed by the camp. Romanies lost their culture here because they did not have the chance to live it. All the problems that developed within these communities, such as drug addiction and alcoholism, are the bitter fruit of an identity crisis. It is wrong to say that the Romani culture is the culture of those living in camps, because this would lead people to think that all Romanies are criminals, steal cars and exploit their children. I am saying that any person, from any culture, living in a camp under those conditions would develop the same problems. (Personal communication, April 4, 2012)

Brazzoduro found analogies between the Romanies living in camps today and the Italian underclasses of half a century ago. Truancy, for instance, should not be seen exclusively as a ‘Romani problem’. The main problem, Brazzoduro argued, was rather that their ghettoisation inside these camps paralyses any process of social inclusion. The existence of the camp has only one meaning: repudiation, rejection. It is beyond dispute: the government shuts Romanies away in a camp. These people need to formulate an immediate response, so they give vent to their anger. ‘You dare to put me in a camp? You force me to live on the margins of society? Then I refuse to respect your laws!’ (Personal communication, July 21, 2012)
The case of M. (as narrated by Romani speakers)

M. lives in Castel Romano camp and has worked there for many years as cultural liaison for a CSO. He is also president of a Romani cooperative championing the rights of the Romani peoples. The City Council contracted this organisation to run the ‘cleaning projects’ inside the camp area. ‘Doing that for eight or nine years, M. earned €15,000 a month,’ a Romani informant of mine remarked (Personal communication, June 26, 2012).

When the present research was completed, the city council was carrying out means-testing aimed at determining eligibility for State support and at removing from the camps those who could afford to live outside. According to a well-known Romani intellectual, a member of one of the federations of Romani organisations, ‘M. was invited many times to participate in the activities and events launched by the federation, but he always refused to be involved. Only now that he is in trouble has M. decided to contact us, asking for help’ (N. G., personal communication, April 21, 2012).

According to N. A., another Romani activist, ‘in this camp, as in others, there were a number of empty, uninhabited ‘shipping’ containers. Some people had been forced to leave the camp because of blood feuds between different factions’ (Personal communication, May 14, 2012). At that point, as reported by one of the inhabitants of the Castel Romano camp (as cited in Nozzoli, 2013, para. 6),

as soon as a ‘camp dweller’ vacate a container in the camp, disputes amongst Romanies begin. The container gets occupied and sold to other people in the camp. But the occupation can also lead to wars between rival groups. These are fought by setting containers on fire. In some cases, burning containers might be a precise strategy that Romanies enact in order to leave the camp and go back to the places from which they had been previously evicted. (para. 5)

In July 2014, an operation conducted by the local police in the Salone camp brought to light an illegal system of trade and rental of these containers. Two policemen were also accused of being involved in the criminal allocation of camp dwellings. As Pierucci (2014) reported, these officials, in collaboration with a number of camp inhabitants, could bribe Romanies to pay up to 2,000 euro for a container. The trade and rental of containers has thus become a big business for a number of Romani families. This activity is certainly not only Rome-based. Similar cases were also reported in Romani encampments of other Italian cities (for Milan see Lodigiani, 2010, p. 179),
M. was one of those who had ‘squatted’ in a few of those containers. When the city council intervened to solve the issue, giving the containers back to the rightful claimants, a ‘guerra tra poveri’ (war among the poor) ensued, and only then did M. decide to request help from the federation and some friends, CSO s and non-Romani intellectuals as well (N.G., personal communication, April June 21, 2012). He tried to create a committee whose members were Romanies living in a number of camps, but his strategy to unite all the Romani leaders and defy the government’s decision was unsuccessful in the end. In a number of meetings I participated between May and July 2012, which brought together both Romani and non-Romani activists, M. was accused of promoting this committee only because his own interests were in danger.

According to N. A.,

It is high time we fought some of the Romani organisations as well. If you take even €1 from the government, you have to explain how you are going to use it. For many years we criticised the non-Romani organisations because they were using public funds improperly. Why should not we condemn the Romani organisations now if they are doing the exact same thing? (Personal communication, June 26, 2012)

The case of E.

E. lives in Castel Romano ‘equipped village’. Like M., she has worked for many years as a cultural liaison with an CSO in this camp. E.’s story was presented by the CSO she was working for as one of the best to have come to their notice since they had been working with Romanies. This was during a private meeting in the presence of a number of public-utility and Third Sector representatives. The informant’s intention was to celebrate the courage of a woman who, despite the many difficulties of living in a camp, raised and educated her children and, in the end, bought her own house. S. G., formerly president of this organisation, summed up this account of her experiences as a ‘percorso di emancipazione bellissimo’ (‘a beautiful emancipation story’):

E. is a woman, a friend and our employee. Her husband is a layabout while she has managed to raise her children and helped get them Italian citizenship. Fifteen years ago she bought a house in T. She sold a house she still owned in Bosnia and made a downpayment on it with this money. Eventually she managed to repay the balance. She asked us for help and we were delighted to support her loan request. She was the first
Romani woman to get micro-credit from the Regione Lazio [the regional government]. She received €10,000 and now she is trying to repay it. We also helped her in other ways, because the city council financed several of our projects. She has been working in these, so we could give her more money. Six months ago I experienced one of the greatest satisfactions I have had since beginning to work with the Romanies. This lady invited us to see her house and it was beautiful: 175 sq. m., two floors and a garden all the way round. This goes to show that a woman with character, given a helping hand by certain institutions and associations, can realise her dream. (Personal communication, July 21, 2012)

Despite the decision to give prominence to E.’s story, several aspects remain unclear. For instance, the not-so-wonderful side of the story, as the speaker admitted at some point, was that E. and her family were still living in the camp. So it was quite confusing, really: how to present this story as a positive example of social inclusion from the CSO perspective? How could anyone talk about emancipation if this woman owned a house and was still living in a ‘shipping’ container inside a ‘campo nomade’? Why in 15 years had this organisation not been able to let this person and her family leave the camp, and stand on their own feet? This person had owned a house in Bosnia but she came to Italy and ended up living in a camp. Then she sold it and bought another house in Italy. Meanwhile, for all these years, she had been working for this CSO and received a regular salary, albeit a basic one. It was hard to see how this could be called a ‘success story’ without instead questioning the ease with which the ‘camps system’ allowed a number of Romani families to take some advantage of it.

The case of B.

B. is a Romani from Romania. He has been living in ‘campi nomadi’ for 20 years. At the moment he lives at Candoni ‘equipped village’ and for the past eight years he has been working as cultural liaison with one of the CSO s in the camp. According to him, most of the Romanies in Candoni (about 70 per cent of them) have a job. Yet they all make their homes in containers in the camp. B. argues that their salaries are not high and would not be enough to cover rent and other basic costs. He thus discloses that the decision not to move out is basically down to convenience:

Although there are a number of Romani families who would like to move out and live in a house, there are also many others that prefer to stay in the camp. They say: ‘Why
should I leave if here I do not have to pay anything?’ (Personal communication, April 4, 2012)

B., for instance, owns a house in Romania, where he and his relatives go from time to time. He admits that the reason for not moving back to Romania is because the situation over there is worse than in Italy. Salaries are even lower there – about €200 euro a month – and this would not be enough to support his family. B. said nobody was forcing him to live in Candoni. For him, living there was the best way to take care of his family.

B. blamed the political classes and the CSO system for the abysmal conditions in the camp. He was quick to point out that the government was squandering an EU grant on the ‘National Strategy’. Then he warned that disunity among the CSO s was directly affecting them: ‘If the CSO s that deal with Romani issues would co-operate with one another they would probably have solved this problem by now’ (personal communication, April 4, 2012). According to him, not only should the government be spending tax revenue to build council houses rather than camps, public institutions and the CSO s should involve the Romanies in developing long-term strategies too. Until this point, he said, ‘Nobody has come to us and asked how we want to live or what we want!’ (personal communication, April 4, 2012).

As well as individual choice, the interview revealed a lack of political consciousness on Romanies’ part. B admitted that the leaders of this and other camps in Rome met regularly (every two weeks). But he also explained, with equal candour, why they could not secure political representation: ‘We are neither politically organised nor united. We are envious of each other’ (personal communication, April 4, 2012).

The case of Co.

Co. is a Romani woman from Serbia who lives in the Via dei Gordiani authorised camp. Her partner, also from Serbia, is 100 per cent disabled. They met back in Serbia but then she decided to follow him in Italy, where he was already living. She was 25 years old (now she is 40) and she did not know that he was living in a ‘nomad camp’. She still cannot believe that she left a real house for a life in a container. She still has not accepted that. According to her ‘being in a camp is like living in hell, especially because there are many people in there that do not think like me’ (personal communication, June 29, 2012). When she migrated, he had been on dialysis for several years already, but she did not know that either. She argues that, although he would be entitled to compensation for that, the only benefit he gets from government is free treatment in hospital where he has to go three times per week. She has
been helping him during the last 15 years. A lawyer of the CSO managing the camp where they live is following their case, but so far their efforts have not been successful.

Since May 2012 she started a ‘borsa lavoro’ at a local tailor’s shop. This is a worker cooperative which runs a number of projects promoting women employability, particularly those in vulnerable positions. Co. will be doing this paid traineeship only for a few months, until October. The cooperative was only founded in early 2012 and they are still a start up. This explains why Co. did not get any salary yet. Cr., the manager of the cooperative, reveals that at the moment they are having some financial difficulties. As Cr. further explains, the CSO who is officially in charge of the ‘borsa lavoro’ on behalf of the local administration, knew since the beginning that there were not going to be any employment opportunities.

Co. mentioned having had previous experiences with ‘borse lavoro’, but they never led to fixed term positions. Besides, whenever they discovered that she is Romani and lives in a camp, she lost her job. Nevertheless, she has been always looking for a job. This is in contrast with the predominant attitude among a number of other Romanies living in camps. According to her:

Not many Romanies are motivated and want to change. Only few of them try hard to find a job, bring their children to school and respect the laws. They are too used to getting ‘easy’ money. They would never go to work. But if you really want a job, you can find something. The other women laugh at me when I say that I go to work. They just wait for their husbands to come back with the money they have earned illegally. Many of them, for instance, get a lot of money begging on the street. And in some cases they invest their money buying properties in their country of origin. But I prefer not to argue with these people, because as soon as you raise your voice tens of them surround you. I just pretend to agree when they talk like that and try to look at my own things. In a way, I feel they are luckier than me. First, because they do not make a fuss over this situation (living in a camp in such conditions), like I do. And second, because in the end they have all the things I don’t have. I should probably follow their example, but I am not able to steal, I have never done it. Sometimes the other Romanies make jokes and say ‘Are you really a Romani person’? (personal communication, June 29, 2012)

The encamped experience for Co. is quite emblematic. It is revealing of the existence of a ‘dual mechanism of exclusion’. On the one hand, she experiences exclusion in relation to Italian institutions and, more in general, mainstream society. On the other hand, she is also
marginalised within the ‘camps system’ as a result of practices of exclusion carried out by Romanies themselves. She cannot get out from the camp, mainly because of the clear difficulty of having to take her of herself and her husband. At the same time, she also feels like not belonging to the camp community. She feels thus trapped in this ‘in-between space’.

The case of Ti.

Ti. is a Romanian Romani man living in the authorised camp in Via Candoni. Before migrating to Italy in the early 1990s, he had tried, unsuccessfully, to settle in Poland and Germany. His migration coincided with the fall of Nicolae Ceauşescu’s dictatorship. Since his first arrival he has been living in different encampments, Salone and Cervara among others, before taking up residence in the Candoni camp. The reason for coming to Rome is because his sister was already living in the Salone camp. He still has positive memories of Ceauşescu’s leadership. At that time, he argues, ‘Romanies were integrated, lived in houses, went to school and the government would provide jobs as well’ (personal communication, June 06, 2012). In Italy, instead, he has been always struggling to find a job and to feed his numerous family (9 children). Despite everything, though, life in Italy is much better than in Romania at the moment, where there is more racism against the Romanies, he argues. With his wife their main activity is to go around the city and collect all sort of recyclable material/objects from the garbage bins. They do not own a van like many other Romanies, so they use strollers instead. He is a very religious person (Catholic) and is proud to tell me that he does not carry any illegal activities, unlike other Romanies living in camps. That explains the nickname they gave him, ‘the priest’. He also showed me newspaper articles in which he is depicted promoting Romani rights.

Quite alarming is the way he describes life in the camp:

The camp is like a little jungle. When you enter here you are not in Italy anymore. It is a place where people become ‘cannibali emancipati’ (emancipated cannibals). Everyone lives to the neighbour’s disadvantage. In the Salone camp there were a lot of Mafia-type criminal activities. In the Candoni camp, where I have been living for the last two years, there are lots of problems as well, particularly between the two major rival groups (Slavic and Romanian peoples). I moved here because I heard that there was an empty container and my wife and I decided to occupy it. It had been assigned to another person, but then he ended up in jail. My wife put the plan into practice while I was out
of town. By doing so we broke an internal code among Romanies. And we had to pay for it if we wanted to stay. (personal communication, June 06, 2012)

At that point of the interview, his wife came out and told him to pay attention to what he says. We thus changed subject and he started talking about his constant quest for a proper job, which over the last ten years has been unsuccessful. He admitted that he has been always trying hard, but none of the so called ‘Pro-Romani’ organisations managing the camps have helped him to get a job (although this is part of their institutional mandate). I have met with Ti. several times. In a few occasions we decided to go together to both private and public job agencies. A number of problems emerged when discussing about job opportunities: he is illiterate, does not hold any qualification, and does not have a driving licence. Consequently, we could not find anything that might have suited the agencies’ requirements. Those seemed to be the major issues to be addressed before to embark again in another job hunt. He confessed that the only organisation that was trying to help him at the moment were the Catholic charity one. Despite their support, though, they have neither been successful in finding an alternative housing solution for him, nor a job.

The case of Ti. is revealing of the lack of any coordinated intervention which over the years could have addressed his basic needs (mainly education and job qualification). In addition, just like in Co.’s case, Ti. is facing the same type of difficulties, occupying a sort of in-between position, ‘other’ in relation to mainstream Italian but also to his own community.

The case of the E., W., B. and G.: the Italian Sinti

E. is an Italian Sinto living at the Barbuta camp. His community converted to evangelicalism since their first arrival in Italy many years ago from France. According to him, religion has been a lifeline for many of them. It helps them to see their situation in a more positive way. Originally he is from the Umbria region but moved in the Lazio region, where he had met the woman he married during his travelling. She used to live in a council house in Rieti. For some time he tried to live there, but after a little while he felt that living in a house was too constraining for him. In his words:

I could not live in an apartment building. I needed open spaces, fresh air and sharing life with my community. In that place you could not even play music that would immediately annoy the other residents. Of course you need to find the right people to live with. In the Casilino 900 camp for instance, the Korakhane group were the dirtiest
group. They would always live their garbage out of their house instead of using the
common bin. I come from a family whose main activity was the ‘travelling show’. I was
born in a camper. My job now is to go around the city with my truck to collect metal or
to clean and empty basements from all sort of material. (personal communication, May
25, 2012)

According to him the situation for the Romanies in Italy got worse since the 1990s, in
conjunction with massive immigration of what he calls ‘foreigner Romanies’. This created a
frictions among the Italian Romani population. Divisions between Italian ‘Rom’ and ‘Sinti’
already existed, but the centuries’ old coexistence mitigated their relationship. The arrival of
many Romanies who did not speak the language and had different traditions increased
tensions between different groups, he argues. One the main issues for them is that only
recently there is more talking about the Sinti as a specific Romani group. For a long time
Romanies in Italy were all called indiscriminately ‘Rom’. The worsening of their living
conditions, though, brought the Sinti to come out and be more vocal regarding their condition.
Yet, not much has been achieved until today, chiefly because all attention goes to the ‘foreign
Romanies’, instead of the ‘Italian’ ones.

Before the 1990s different groups of Sinti were scattered across Italy and could travel
doing their traditional activities mainly unnoticed. But the new Romanies brought a
number of problems, such as drug and army trafficking, prostitution, trade of containers
and the banishment of the unwanted from the camp life. (personal communication, May
25, 2012)

G. has been living at the Barbuta camp for the last 17 years. His main activity also entails the
collection of metal around the city. The main problems raised by G. were all related to the
camp life and his own professional activity. According to him, the Barbuta camp is one of the
most polluted camps in Rome, not only because of its proximity to the Ciampino airport, but
also because of the Korakhane group, who have the habit of burning dangerous waste inside
the camp, ladening the atmosphere with harmful smoke. This situation is aggravated by the
fact that that despite their differences, Sinti and Rom have been basically forced to live
together since the time of the Rutelli administration. As for the profession he and many other
Romanies carry on ‘illegally’, his comments point out the potential revenue that the collectivity
may have from them:
We want to work, we clean Rome and recycle unwanted things, but we need the possibility to do this job legally. We need authorizations. The city has not legalised our activity yet, despite the fact it could bring millions of euro to the city council. (personal communication, April 5, 2012)

W. and B., unlike E. and G., are still in the ‘travelling show’ business. They live in different cities, W. in Rome and G. in Ravenna, but they both experience the same type of problems that seem to associate the whole Sinti population more in general. W., in particular, is also member of the organisation Opera Nomadi which, according to him, at the moment it is the only CSO dealing with the situation of the Sinti in Italy. W., B., G. and E. all complain about the fact that over the years the introduction of a number of new legislative measures have considerably affected their profession. After having spent many years in a camp, W. lives now in a council house at the peripherie of Rome. He is the owner of a small ‘giostra’ (carousel). According to him,

Many Sinti found themselves squashed in an ocean of new laws and did not know how to navigate among them. Now if you want to run a ‘giostra’ first you need to do an electrician course, first aid training, etc. All things that I think are useless for our job and costly. At the same time the opening of huge amusement parks have also endangered our small, mainly family-run, businesses. As a consequence 70 per cent of our people do not own a ‘giostra’ anymore. We have been forced to quit our profession. Another traditional activity is horse trading, but we stopped doing that as well, since it is not a productive business anymore. We don’t want to end up being recruited by the Mafia like many ‘Rom’ people. (personal communication, April 14, 2012)

B.’s story is not dissimilar from W.’s. B. proudly defines himself as a ‘giostraio’ (carousel holder) who does not want to give up despite the difficulties. At the moment is fighting with the city council of Ravenna, where he resides, because they are refusing to comply with the Law 337/1968 (a specific law safeguarding the travelling show business). This regulation, in fact, establishes that certain areas should be devoted to the temporary running of their activities/shows (personal communication, April 5, 2012). According to W. the cities of Modena, Forli’ and Piacenza have provided a good solution to this problem by creating micro-areas explicitly designed for this purpose.
The main issue that seems to emerge from these interviews is a clear contraposition between Rom and Sinti groups. W. often referred to them using the term ‘gli altri’ (the others). This explains why the Mayor decision to nominate Najo Adzovic as his personal liaison with Rome’s Romani communities was highly criticised by the Sinti. As W. states, ‘we did not feel represented by a foreign Romani’. At the same time, the Rom groups also discriminate the Sinti. According to W., ‘the Rom assimilate Sinti to the “Gadje” people, because we show a great fluency in Italian, while a consistent part of the “foreign Romanies” cannot speak Italian’ (personal communication, April 14, 2012). The division between these two major Romani groups is thus not only defined by different customs and traditions, but also by the language factor. As for their traditions, most of the Sinti, as W. argues, still consider themselves as being nomadic, unlike many Rom groups, and would like to preserve their itinerant business. E., G., B. and W. all consider themselves Italian. Yet, they argue, ‘despite being Italian citizens, we still live at the margins of the Italian society’ (personal communication, April 14, 2012).

The case of T.

T. is a business woman and president of a social cooperative that specialises in waste recycling. She is not Romani. In 2010 her enterprise was involved in the Programma RETIS (2012). This project was promoted by the city council with the aim of training and employing people in disadvantaged categories (that is, Romanies as well as other peoples). Among them, 26 Romanies living in camps were selected by the local administration to be part of this employment program. After a brief period of training, they were granted six-month paid traineeships. At the end of this period, six Romanies were hired by the cooperative and offered renewable contracts. T. highlighted all the difficulties she had to face during the training process: some of the Romanies refused to follow safety guidelines, some would not follow directions issued by a female manager, some got violent, some stole, and some absented themselves from work without giving notice. Despite the fact that Programma RETIS was in charge of supervising all the activities and assessing outcomes, T. was left alone to run the project. Social services, CSO’s working in the camp where these Romanies resided, the employment bureau: you name it, no one supported her during the training period (personal communication, June 28, 2012).

Many lacked valid papers. In some cases, she discovered that some of these workers had been in jail and the council had not let her know about it. This happened when she was collecting all the documentation required to employ them. Some could speak no Italian. Most had no education at all. But the main problem for her, it would appear, was that these people
were living in camps often very far from their workplace. Invariably, some of the Romanies would get to work late. This eventually caused tensions with the rest of the workforce. They complained to T. because they felt their Romani co-workers had easier jobs than theirs. Although some of them had a regular salary, they were not looking for a house to rent outside the camp. Most of the Romani employees had been living in houses before they arrived in Rome, only to be told by their Romani friends that they could live in a camp free of charge. T. told the story of a 52-year-old man who had been saving and was now very close to buying a house back in Romania:

The other employees, who are mainly immigrants and have similar problems, use their salary to rent a room and pay their bills. Why do the Romanies have to be different from other workers? They are much too used to asking questions rather than sweating their guts out. I had similar problems when I first arrived in Italy. I was an illegal immigrant with an 11-year-old daughter. At first I found a free boarding school for her and did several jobs to support us. In the meantime I tried to get an education. Then gradually, when I could afford it, we went back to living together. We made loads of sacrifices. [...] The city council and the CSO’s should organise ethnically based projects and constantly monitor progress. They should also stop investing money in building camps. My Romani employees keep telling me they really dislike living there. But it is too convenient for them because they do not pay anything. I believe that once you have got yourself a job, you should get out of there. (Personal communication, June 28, 2012)

The case of the former inhabitants of Casilino 900

In January 2010, after having personally reached an agreement with the camp’s inhabitants, Alemanno ordered the closure of Casilino 900. Already, the previous year, the spokespersons for the camp had signed a written paper in which they agreed to support the city council’s wishes during the relocation. More than 600 Romanies were transferred in partnership with the CRI to several ‘equipped villages’ around the city: 200 in Salone; 96 in Candoni; 173 in Camping River; 40 in Gordiani; and 64 at a homeless shelter in Via Amarilli.

In February 2010 the mayor had officially guaranteed that the city council would provide this group with work and houses (Stasolla, 2012). In May 2012, however, a group of residents of the former Casilino 900 started planning to reoccupy the area. The Romanies’ representatives organised an informal meeting to examine whether the conditions were ripe to do so. I attended the meeting as part of the fieldwork. During the consultation, N., a Romani
man from the former Yugoslavia and leader of this group, maintained that this action had received approval from the ‘Council of Elders’. According to him, 700 Romanies, mostly from the ex-Casilino 900, and certain Catholic organisations were supposedly supporting the occupation. A number of non-Romani intellectuals and activists, mainly belonging to the leftist political bloc, took part. Most of them had been defending the cause of the inhabitants of Casilino 900, at least until they did a volte-face and supported Alemanno’s relocation plan instead.21

On this occasion, the non-Romani participants were suspicious of N.’s real intentions. N. had always supported Alemanno’s strategy and now he was suddenly hurling accusations at the Mayor. They liked the idea of a symbolic occupation of Casilino 900, but their main concern was that this action had to be part of a larger political strategy. They would have supported it in the context of the mayoral election campaign due in June 2013. But this time they also wanted to be sure that the Romanies were not going to change their political strategy again.

For this reason they asked N. to take a public position against the current Mayor and his politics. This would give N. a chance to redeem himself after his ‘betrayal’. During the meeting, N. presented the rationale for plotting against Alemanno. He complained that the administration had not solved the Romani question. But he also criticised the Romanies. Through his own mediation, many of them had received financial aid from the local administration: but, unfortunately, they had used this assistance to pursue their own interests. Now N. was aiming to reform his own community as well. His big idea was to return to Casilino

21 For many years there was a close collaboration between Casilino 900 ‘camp dwellers’ and a number of local organisations. Stalker/On, in particular, had been supporting self-organisation processes in areas of extreme marginalisation. Bringing together people of different backgrounds and disciplines, their main idea was to propose valid alternatives to ‘nomad camps’ through the employment of self-construction methods. This would have enabled mutual learning between Romanies and ‘Gadje’ while triggering a responsibilisation process among the Romani peoples (Fioretti, 2011, p. 552). ‘Savorengo Ker’, which in the Romani language means ‘the house for everyone’, was one of their projects. Designed and built together by Romanies and non-Romanies, the project aimed to use ‘Romani people’s own distinctive practices of dwelling and building and embedding them in a proposal comprehensible and acceptable to non-Roma’ (Laboratorio Arti Civiche, n.d., para. 5). Despite showing a housing solution which was safer, more ecological and less expensive than a container, the initiative met the strong oppositions. Of the surrounding Italian population, who was against the existence of the camp itself, together with that of public administration which accelerated the process of clearing the area (Fioretti, 2011, p. 552). What has been termed ‘a manifesto house’ produced by the Romanies, the wooden structure was terminated in July 2008 but never officially opened, until it was burned down by unknown people. Some of the Romani ‘camp dwellers’ suggested that the fire might have been started by Romanies themselves. In fact, there was at the time an ongoing feud among Casilino 900 inhabitants: some supported Alemanno’s project of moving camp inhabitants elsewhere; while others did not want to leave the camp area (‘Casilino 900, brucia,’ 2008). N. and the other Romanies had all been publicly involved in this project.
900 and mount a ‘permanent occupation’, restoring the traditional Romani presence in that vicinity.

The plan implied the transfer of hundreds of Romanies (most of them former inhabitants of Casilino 900) from ‘equipped villages’ (where at least they now had containers and some basic infrastructure) to an urban desert. Some of the participants agreed, at least hypothetically, with N.’s idea: others were more sceptical. They felt this plan was either too starry-eyed, or deficient in political vision. Some suggested it would be more useful to ‘squat’ in a vacant building or houses instead of going back to nothing. Overall, the Romani representatives looked disorganised and with no cohesive plan to speak of. Occupying Casilino 900 seemed to be their only objective.

At some point one of the Romani participants made a statement that unveiled the real rationale behind the plan. According to him, the closure of Casilino 900 and transfer of hundreds of Romanies had upset the balance of power between different Romani groups in all the ‘equipped villages’ affected by the relocation. He confessed that on several occasions older residents of the camp had harsh words for the newer arrivals. ‘They said, “We do not want you here. You cannot come here and dictate your own rules.” This was happening all over the place: that is why now we are examining the feasibility of returning to our old homes’ (Personal communication, May 14, 2012).

A few significant points emerged from the meeting. First of all, the Romanies gathered here demonstrated clear political capacity. They had supported the Alemanno administration while they believed this could secure them some advantages. As soon as it became clear this was a chimera, they immediately reconsidered their previous decision and planned to occupy Casilino 900 again. This idea was presented without thinking through what the ultimate goal of the exercise was, if not to offer this action as a political tool to their non-Romani supporters. Romanies from the former Casilino 900 got the opportunity to explore potential agreements with activists and CSO s of Left and Right alike. Secondly, their strategy implied their faith in the ‘logic of power by possession’. In this variation of the ‘squatter’s charter’ – that if they could settle in one place for long enough and resist attempts to move them out, they would somehow have earned the right to ‘own’ it.

As a matter of fact, this is a logic that is shared by many Romani communities – extended families in most cases – in different parts of the city. An interview a month earlier with a representative of the Cesare Lombroso camp confirmed this point. H. criticised Najo Adzovic for having ‘sold out’ his community: ‘He did not have to do it. That area [already]
belonged to the Romani peoples who had occupied it for many years,’ he had noted (Personal communication, April 2, 2012).

Final observations

Gheorghe and Pulay (2013) concluded that the ‘time has come to suggest some serious changes in Roma civil society’. There is the compelling need for a language that goes beyond political correctness and challenges the assumptions of liberal human rights discourse. Recent polemics over Roma integration are mingled with a reluctance to address ‘touchy’ or ‘risky’ issues – sometimes even ‘taboos’ – by those who strive to defend the rights of Roma or by Roma themselves. We need to forge a new language, based on a frank and critical revision of previous approaches, to understand the origins of this crisis and move forward. This is why we really need to talk about such controversial topics as the links between Roma international mobility, chain-migration, human trafficking and criminality; the inequality of women and men amongst the Roma; the ‘begging-business’, in particular the forced involvement of children and teen-agers in activities such as begging; the practice of early marriages in some traditional communities; and the exploitation of child labour by certain families who sometimes take advantage of the elderly or disabled as well. (p. 41)

This chapter could not present an encouraging picture of the Romani movement in Italy. Certainly, the policy adopted by the government did not help them find their own voice. A number of issues still await action at the national level: among them legal status, cultural recognition and the camps. The ‘National Strategy’, for instance, which should finally have ushered in real change, could not adequately address the issue of securing authentic political representation for Romanies.

The situation of the Romani movement in Rome was particularly dramatic. The boom in cooperatives and associations in the capital over the past decade now resembles a short-lived’ soap bubble’. These organisations were still lacking real political awareness, not to mention an agreed strategy, and were principally motivated by the need to access State funds. Competitiveness among the Romanies lay at the heart of life in the camps. These groups were generally more oriented to protecting their own family interests than letting anything so lofty as the Romani cause be their guiding light. Widespread corruption also characterised life within the camps, the research discovered. This was also instigated by the
Italian political class and institutions who found preserving this situation advantageous. A sense of victimhood and an incapacity for consensus reinforced the need to depend on this or that politician or CSO. Paradoxically, the camp became the only place where Romanies felt secure and protected. Mainstream society was still perceived as a threatening environment where it would have been more difficult to survive without community support. Nevertheless, in contrast to a prevailing belief that Romani peoples were merely passive actors, institutionalised by the government and forced to live inside the ‘campi nomadi’, this chapter showed a different reality. Many of them, in fact, had a house and a job but chose to live in the camp as a deliberate survival strategy.

Government and CSO’s have made a lucrative business out of the Romani issue, but the Romanies have also learned to use the ‘camps system’ to achieve their own goals. In fact, as an anthropologist who worked with Romanies in Rome for many years, has contended:

we should not underestimate the capacity of the Romani peoples for self-consultation. The capital city went through a traumatic period because of Najo Adzovic. But Romanies never stopped meeting and consulting each other even during this time. They tried to create a sort of ‘lobby’, even if this was unsuccessful in the end. That is why when I hear of Romani peoples asking ‘Gadje’ individuals and organisations for help I am immediately suspicious: their access to funds - for either the ‘schooling projects’ or ‘clean up the camp’ - has probably been stopped, so they need to find new ways to support themselves. (Personal communication, June 26, 2012)

It is important to recognise the existence of a top-down approach adopted by government and CSO’s, which was always going to leave slender scope for the Romani voice. But it has to be acknowledged that bottom-up opposition, as voiced by the Romani communities living in camps, does exist. ‘Resistance’ has played a key role in pushing the government and the CSO’s to do something, even if it amounts to a self-justifying paternalism. This in turn assisted them in keeping the ‘ghetto economy’, as Gheorghe dubbed it, alive (Personal communication, July 21, 2012).

The government embarked on a strategy that reproduced marginality. The Romanies were ‘racialised’ as a pretext for introducing specific ethnic policies, in which contracted CSO’s would deliver an array of social inclusion programs, thus creating a ‘social mechanism of complicity’ (Gheorghe, personal communication, July 21, 2012).
The Romanies, meanwhile, reverted to old stereotypes in order to evoke pity and promote assistentialism. The saga of the camps not only showed the human genius for creating a complex system in which everyone got some advantage, it also reinforced and crystallised the centuries-old contrast between Romanies and non-Romanies. Yet, while the ‘Romani of the camps’ has been fighting an ‘invisible battle’ with mainstream society – becoming visible only in negative terms, when bad news wafts our way, the greater proportion of the Romani population remains invisible. They prefer to hide their cultural background, avoid the risk of being discriminated against and shun comparisons with the ‘visible’ Romanies.

What is needed, as suggested by Gheorghe, is an ‘epistemological fracture’, a break in the time warp and a new language: Romanies should no longer be the objects of ‘assistance’, although there will still be a place for ‘resistance’, but the main aspiration now must be to see them become the main actors in their own lives. After a long period of ‘involution’, as he further suggested, the Romanies need to ‘re-mobilise’ (Personal communication, July 21, 2012).

But no one expects the road ahead to be easy. Effecting real social change in a time of economic crisis, widespread populism and resurgent racism will be a formidable challenge for the future.
CHAPTER VII

Conclusions

The research on Romani conditions in Italy reveals underlying ethnocentric schemes to assimilate them. From analysis of the Italian approach to cultural diversity it was clearly notable that this failed to value the Romani communities’ presence positively and to promote their culture. Romanies are basically expected to assimilate or conform to the dominant culture. Public institutions still tend to categorise Romanies as ‘nomads’ or immigrants. More generally, Italy still treats immigration as a socio-economic ‘emergency’ rather than a structural phenomenon and a resource, at both the cultural and economic levels (Intercultural Dialogue, 2007). This situation led to the development of two parallel and mutually exclusive discourses, which in turn have created two specific categories of the population. One concerns a generic type of immigrant, while the other is specifically devised for the ‘Zingaro’.

The most dramatic result of the strategic interpretation that Romani culture is inherently nomadic has been the ghettoisation of part of the Romani population within the ‘campi nomadi’, where they live in conditions of practical segregation from the rest of society, as highlighted in Chapter III. In these camps Italian-Romani citizens and Romani citizens of other EU member states, as well as stateless persons, are thrown together without distinction or consultation:

The building of these camps has generally been accomplished without negotiation or involvement of the clients; people of different origins, ethnic or cultural backgrounds, have been literally piled up all together in the same space. The fact that these groups were incompatible with each other has often fuelled internal conflict and deviant behaviours. (UNAR, 2011b, p. 42)

Violent episodes within these establishments are indeed linked to a raft of socio-economic factors: people of diverse cultures crammed into confined spaces, the physical isolation of being on the urban outskirts, where under-serviced or un-serviced districts are cursed with chronic poverty and unemployment, widespread racism and no history or pattern of social inclusion.

This situation has deteriorated since May, 21, 2008, when, as discussed in Chapter IV, the Berlusconi Government decreed a ‘State of Emergency’ to counter the presence of ‘nomad communities’ in the Campania, Lazio and Lombardy regions (Ministero dell’Interno, 2011). But
this dispensation merely signalled a concerted strategy to tackle the ‘Problema Nomadi’ with one important difference. In the 1980s and 1990s, as illustrated in Chapter III, there was a declared intention to preserve supposedly ‘nomadic cultures’ by creating Romani settlements in authorised areas as a way station to integration. By the late 2000s this policy had evolved into permanent ‘institutional segregation’ (ERRC, 2000; Fiorucci, 2010).

Chapter V explored how Romanies were now institutionalised under a ‘patrol and surveillance’ system whose symbol was the camp, not just a structure or space of repression but one link in a chain of such institutions organically connected for the operation and preservation of the entire mechanism. Bravi and Sigona (2006) describe the camp as ‘no man’s land’, a place whose raison d’être is to confine people adjudged by mainstream cultural standards to be ‘Other’, a place where individuals lose their sense of personhood through a remorseless process of bureaucratic classification. By now, argues Nicola (2011), the camp has developed into a ‘total institution’. As discussed in Chapters III, IV and V, the inevitable result was a form of ‘ethnic or racial segregation’ (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2011b), a throwback to the type of forced seclusion associated with the first ghettos, founded by the Venetian Republic as a place of captivity for Jews in 1516 (Nicola, 2011).

Branding the Romani individual as ‘Other’ and ‘nomad’ was reinforced with a number of other official measures. Several city councils around Italy have special offices dedicated to ‘immigrants and nomads’, or just to ‘nomads’. A few examples will make the point: the city of Asti has a ‘Sportello Stranieri e Nomadi’ (Immigrants and Nomads Office; Comune di Asti, n.d.), the city of Turin, an ‘Informa Stranieri e Nomadi’ (Information Desk for Immigrants and Nomads; Comune di Torino, n.d.); the city of Palermo, a ‘Nomadi e Immigrati’ division (Comune di Palermo, 2012); the city of Rome, an ‘Ufficio Nomadi’ (Nomads Office; Comune di Roma, n.d.); and the Ufficio Immigrazione (immigration office) della Questura di Roma also has a designated counter that only serves ‘nomads’ (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2012d; Daniele, 2011a). It is clear that Romani peoples, as Chapter III in particular recognised, are commonly perceived and categorised as foreigners, and deemed different from the rest of the population.

This Othering process is self-publicised by the constant stream of forced evictions. All this is assumed to have contributed towards their ‘unsettledness’, which only confirms the sense of superiority felt by society’s power cliques towards the overt misery of the the Romani peoples, and that sense is then recycled into further justification of the ‘camps policy’ and the enactment of emergency measures. As Clough Marinaro (2009) argues, amid a dread of police ‘swoops’ and mass deportations, ‘the Roma are trapped in a dual predicament of
“rightlessness” (p. 267), between the biopolitical confines of the official camp and the life of a constant fugitive from violence, potentially leading to death.

Carlo Stasolla has found an apt metaphor for the current situation: ‘It is like a snakes-and-ladders game: if Romanies make it all the way [up the board], then so does the money’ (as cited in Castri & Aversano, 2011, p. 31). Even evictions are a lucrative business, as the Social Policy Councillor for the Provincia di Roma, Claudio Cecchini, acknowledges:

We will never be told the truth about the way the funds for Romani issues have been used. But one thing is for sure: there has never been so much money for this cause. And yet we have very poor results to show for it. (2012)

A representative of the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL; the Left-leaning peak national trade union body) stated recently that the ‘Nomad Emergency’ had failed to reach its goals. He attributed this largely to the fact that most of the money authorised for tackling the ‘Romani problem’ was spent on forced evictions, running the ‘authorised camps’ and keeping them under surveillance (Facondi, 2011). The ‘unauthorised/illegal’ camps have increased in numbers, instead of shrinking as the Municipality of Rome had planned: from 80, when the strategy launched, they had almost doubled, to 153, by October 2010. Sadly, this proliferation was the predictable outcome of evictions and of a perverse system calculated to endure and reproduce itself.

Summary of findings

Over the past decade the Italian government has signed a number of international agreements and, as one of its flagship national objectives, committed itself to the empowerment of Romani groups. In the face of this commitment, this research has assembled evidence of a policy drive in the opposite direction – one that has curbed Romani involvement in influencing the politics that will directly affect them. Implementation of the ‘camps policy’ amounted to the most obvious example of political single-mindedness to push the Romani communities beyond the margins of mainstream society, and exclude it as much as possible from public life. As discussed in Chapters V and VI, the Romani issue was largely used, by public and Third Sector bodies alike, to build up a lucrative business, but the Romanies themselves have also learned to use the ‘camps system’ for their own ends. This element in the equation contradicts a well-established view of them as merely passive actors, institutionalised and made powerless by a government that has forced them into a type of
This research was premised on a new approach to the Romani communities living in State-sanctioned camps. The circumstances of these communities were portrayed as part of a broader mechanism of control and marginalisation, but also of resistance and ‘collective-identity closure’. This complex of activities is defined by the term ‘camp system’. This section provides a synthesis of two empirical findings arising from this study.

My first conclusion was formulated in relation to the 2008 ‘Nomad Emergency’ intervention and the 2011 National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Camminanti Communities. In Chapters III and IV I argued that the marginalised position of the ‘Romanies of the camps’ should be understood as the result of protracted institutional paralysis and a political vacuum. The declaration of a national ‘State of Emergency’ should be a reminder that, the normal functioning of the government had not previously occurred. As for the ‘National Strategy’ announced in 2011, although the Italian Government fulfilled its pledge to develop a new approach to inclusion of the Romani peoples this effort was made mostly on paper. While the ‘emergency’ approach aggravated already poor living conditions for the Romani population, the ‘National Strategy’ reconfirmed a well-established top-down government-knows-best attitude that dismissed the notion of directly involving the ‘target group’ itself in any policy deliberations. Analysis of the fieldwork interviews shows that Romani peoples remain totally excluded from access to genuine decision-making power.

The second conclusion concerned implementation of Rome’s ‘Piano Nomadi’ launched in 2009 by Mayor Gianni Alemanno in the context of the aforementioned ‘camps system’. This system, whose functioning was the subject of in-depth examination in Chapters V and VI, is shown to have arisen from: the combined actions of different governmental and non-governmental agencies; an entrenched inclination to racism and regulatory powers; a charity-oriented philosophy on the part of CSO s; and a bottom-up (grassroots) reaction on the part of Romani communities living in the camps.

Chapter V scrutinised the role played by local government and CSO s in the Third Sector. I have argued here that local institutions and their sub-contracted agents were constrained from going beyond a charity dispensation in their dealings with the ‘Romanies of the camps’. The way each party behaved in the complex interrelations between them has been shown to establish a mechanism of ‘inclusive exclusion’ in which, the ‘Romani problem’ became a precondition for its survival and replication. Public authorities found it extremely difficult to commit themselves on this issue. Over time, the Third Sector CSO s moved to fill the political vacuum and ‘patch things up’. In this context, old complaints regarding lack of
transparency and accountability have not yet been heeded, and without them it is not possible to gauge objectively whether civic and national governments have made any progress towards the avowed goal of social inclusion. From the evidence adduced, it is safe to say that the pace of progress has not been accelerated by clashes between the City of Rome and the Third Sector on both philosophical and operational matters. Importantly, these clashes have harmed the Romani communities both parties profess to be trying to help, drowning out their voices and cementing their welfare dependency.

Chapter VI attempted to survey the ‘camps policy’ from Romani perspectives. In contrast to the prevailing belief that Romanies are passive actors on the public stage, institutionalised in their ‘campi nomadi’, this study discovered a different reality. The work of Foucault (1990) on power and resistance proved helpful in the analysis of the Romanies’ interaction with the majority. The adoption of ‘resistance’ practices, as discussed in Chapter VI, led to relative valuations – some of them more than a little surprising – in regard to the by-products of the ‘camps system’: ethnical-sounding inclusion policies, the stock nostalgia of ‘package-Gypsies who sell better on the human rights market’ (Mantras, as cited in Boscoboinik, 2009, p. 189) and the dubious honour of keeping a sort of ‘ghetto economy’ alive in the 21st century (Nicolae Gheorghe, personal communication, July 21, 2012).

Closing observations

The Romani communities constitute 0.2 per cent of the Italian population. Of this portion, a small fraction (about 3 per cent) actually maintains a ‘nomadic’ lifestyle (Ministero dell’Interno, 2006; Commission Diritti Umani del Renato, 2011; Riniolo & Marcaletti, 2013). Still, as illustrated throughout this thesis, the Italian Government, despite being strongly criticised by the ECRI (2012), continues to base an important part of its national policy on a definition of ‘Romanies’ that makes the word co-terminous with ‘nomadi’, a designation that implies that they are unwilling or unable to settle within their host society, ‘resisting the norms of territoriality and cultural normalisation’ (Balibar, 2009, foreword).

Because of this, they are looked (down) on as a national ‘problem’ that must be addressed with extraordinary measures, as discussed in Chapter IV. Seventy years after the end of the Second World War, public discourse about what Italians have come to call their ‘problema Zingari’ still revolves around the same three key concepts of ‘nomadism’, ‘asociality’ and ‘re-education’ which have been touchstones of discrimination against these peoples throughout history (Bravi & Sigona, 2006, p. 858). The existence of major ‘gaps’ in the Italian collective memory (Ventresca, 2006a), a tendency to ignore or deny the reality of moments of
national shame, historical revisionism (Boursier, 1999; Clough Marinaro, 2009; Favero, 2010),
and a preparedness to play down the persecution of Romani peoples are all salient
characteristics of contemporary Italian public discourse, just as they were during the Fascist
era (Bravi, 2006).

In this context, the ‘campo nomadi’ represents a weapon for the social control of an
allegedly dangerous people. In the public mind, this allegation has gradually crystallised into
the ‘objectification of a state of exception’ (Bravi & Sigona, 2006, p. 858). Manufacturing an
‘Emergenza Nomadi’ is the juridical precondition for its proclamation (Clough Marinaro, 2009).

Dilapidated and abandoned infrastructure – by now a common sight in these
encampments – is generally the consequence of officialdom’s paralysis and indifference to the
living conditions of human beings once defined as ‘popoli delle discariche’, or peoples of the
dumps (Piasere, 2005). The true answer to the question of what produced this ‘emergency’
and the grounds for such extraordinary measures is therefore ‘vuoto istituzionale’, an official
and political vacuum – an absence of rational and analytical thought among the political and
administrative elites, as argued in Chapters IV and V.

The State’s decision to isolate the Romanies reinforced the popular perception of them
as ‘alien/exogenous’ communities (Amnesty International, 2011b; ERRC, OsservAzione, &
Amalipé Romanò, 2010). Sigona (2002) argues that in Italy it is the experience of an encamped
existence, and the government politics behind the compulsion to do so, that create ‘Zingari’
(Gypsies) as a specific ethnic collectivity. This surrealist portrait has the power to establish
them as a ‘target group’. Using Marotta’s (2011a) work, the camp became an ‘ethnic place’ as
a result of the ‘social sorting’ indulged in by political and economic forces with implications
that transcend, but certainly include, control of the Romanies. In turn, the existence of an
inhospitable environment dominated by racism and discrimination has provoked the target
group to develop, in its turn, a sort of ‘reactive ethnicity’ (pp. 202-203).

Change must come from within Romani civil society as well as from the comprehensive
reform of institutional approaches and Third Sector practices. The last decade was
characterised by intense cultural and political turmoil among the Romani communities in Italy.
This triggered a ‘boom’ in the formation of Romani organisations all over the country. As
discussed in Chapter VI, though, arguing that the Romani movement is strong, cohesive and
monolithic would be a misrepresentation. Not only is there marked disunity between ‘Italian’
and ‘foreign Romanies’, conflict is common in the camp-dwelling communities as well.

My research has revealed that the condition of Romani associationism is particularly
weak in the city of Rome. This fact may be related to another: that of the considerable number
of so-called projects founded in recent years, the overwhelming majority were established with the one aim of accessing public funds rather than progressing real strategies for the social inclusion of their communities. A genuine political awareness and a jointly agreed strategy were nowhere to be seen.

In conclusion, Romani society in today’s Italy is unarguably the target of marginalisation and discrimination. These themes have been extensively covered by the media, academics, politicians and CSO’s. But the most striking aspects of Romani life addressed by this thesis are the true, yet widely unrecognised, causes of their predicament and the depth of mainstream society’s ignorance about their daily living conditions.

My research has uncovered sufficient repetition of discursive patterns to establish that the ‘incarceration’ of Romanies in camps has been spectacularly good for business – involving a number of agencies, public and private, Romani and non-Romani. This research has produced a clearer picture of this complex system, helping to highlight the main causes of the social exclusion and marginalisation of this minority group:

• firstly, a democratic deficit in the way local authorities and agencies operated, particularly during the past decade;
• secondly, it emphasized the responsibilities of some CSOs, mainly those working inside the ‘campi nomadi’: their funding dependence, and a tendency to mediate with local authorities, have prevented them from responding adequately to the Romanies’ needs and reinforced welfare dependency among the ‘Romanies of the camps’;
• Finally, it uncovered within these communities resistance practices, modes of defiance and acts of self-assertion, which are identifiable as side effects of self-ghettoisation produced by the existence of the ‘camps system’.

It is in light of all these elements that a more or less open state of conflict between ‘Gadje’ and ‘Zingari’ has developed. Both communities, for years now, have regularly ‘constructed’ and reified a strong sense of their own identity, each in opposition to the other. The ‘camps system’ represents today the highest expression of this opposition.

On May 2, 2013 the Court of Cassation, Italy’s highest court, ultimately upheld the ruling which had declared unfounded, unwarranted and unlawful the ‘Emergenza Nomadi’. The court thus rejected the government’s appeal against the Council of State’s finding from November 2011 (European Roma Rights Centre, 2013). Despite this watershed ruling, at the time of completing this dissertation (May 2014), political and ideological attacks on Romanies
continue. As conveyed in a recent report issued by the European Roma Rights Centre (2014),
housing, employment, education and health projects are still inadequate to the challenge of
achieving the authentic inclusion of Romanies as the ‘National Strategy’ prescribes (p. 7).
Public funds are basically used to promote a ‘fake’ inclusion (Massimiliano Fiorucci, personal
communication, December 20, 2011). An emergency approach based on the tried and failed
‘camps policy’ and on forced evictions remains in place.

A final consideration

Looking at the case of the Romanies in Italy a final question can be raised. How can
interculturalism as declared policy, the refusal to recognise Romanies as a historico-linguistic
minority–like other well-established ethnic groups, a status that would have enhanced and
protected their language and culture—, and their consignment to a life of segregation all
coexist with one another?

Interculturalism became a key element in several significant government initiatives,
mainly in education. Yet, the lack of resources surely remains a weak link in the Italian
educational system. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and
Development (OECD) (2011), Italy remains among the European countries with the lowest
investments in education, calculated as a percentage of GDP (p. 3). In educational practice, the
responsibility of introducing innovative measures for the inclusion of foreign students and the
elaboration of intercultural strategies was basically left at the discretion of each school or the
keenest teachers, or outsourced to Third Sector associations (Gobbo, Ricucci & Galloni, 2009).
It remained more a declaration of intent than a suite of policies (Santerini, 2006). Besides,
interculture has gradually become an accepted term, used to define a vast range of initiatives,
all differing in their motivations, intentions and results.

The schooling system is the main institution for managing the issue of foreign students
and developing innovative measures for their inclusion. The importance of the school
institution was recognised by UNAR (2012b) as a key element in the ‘National Strategy’, but
Italy’s Ministry of Education produced only general instructions and some basic principles on
how interculture should be implemented (Caneva, 2012). In terms of advancing an
intercultural approach, the case of the Romani children was not used to challenge prevailing
practice. Gobbo (2011) argued that although ‘the Roma pupil is a case of cultural deprivation
and/or social disadvantage’ he/she was still ‘studied as a case apart rather than a special
opportunity to test the intercultural approach’ (p. 16). Romanies continue to be treated
differently from other foreigners. Intercultural theory was not the main theme of this thesis,
but the plight of the Romani peoples clearly emphasises the weakness of the ‘Italian way’ to cultural diversity.

Romani communities, and immigrants more generally, are still considered ‘security’ issues and treated solely through the application of extraordinary actions. Politicians refer to the idea of national ‘insecurity’ in order to convey a political willingness to pursue a more ‘muscular’ approach towards diversity and ‘Othered’ communities. Despite its official adoption, the intercultural approach has been poorly executed in Italy in recent decades (Fiorucci, 2011; Gobbo, 2011; Santerini, 2006). In the end, interculture is more the result of improvised steps than of a stable and durable framework of inclusion policies. The main trend was towards gradual disinvestment. Paradoxically, spending on the ‘camps policy’ has been on the rise. My thesis does not reject this approach per se, but its future as an official approach to cultural diversity depends on the recognition that at the moment its foundation in Italy rests on very shaky grounds.

**Possible directions for future analysis**

The issue of borders and invasion from outside in Italy has often created a sense of ‘ungovernability’ and ‘insecurity’. As a consequence scapegoating attitudes emerged particularly towards the Romanies, often depicted as public enemies. The role of nationalism in this governing of marginal populations is not the main focus of this thesis —this is more about the variegated world circulating inside and around ‘nomad camps’—, but it is surely central to the way the Italian government has been constant enacting emergency approaches in order to deal with Romani issues, and immigration more in general. The dissertation, in fact, provides a comprehensive but broad normative analysis of the ‘camps system’. This theoretical framework could be further elaborated by placing it in the context of democratic theory. The present study also does not address enough the new kinds of stereotypes that make these interventions possible. For the Romanies, their culture is pathologised and is what makes them ungovernable or prone to violence, crime and social collapse. This is a sign of new forms of racism that moves from ‘biology’ to making ‘culture’ the site of pathology and thus the reason for intervention. The proliferation of discourses and practices of exclusion not limited to the Romanies —their case could be compared to the case of Muslim citizens— gained strength and are no longer limited to extreme right movements. Reflecting upon democratic and identity theories might be helpful in analysing the applicability of the ‘model of ethnic democracy’ theorised by Smooha (2009) to the Italian socio-political context.


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