

Ethnography of the 'gypsy problem' in Italy: The case of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali in Florence and Venice

Ferdinando Sigona (2009)

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Ethnography of the 'Gypsy problem' in Italy

The case of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali in
Florence and Venice

Ferdinando Sigona

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Philosophy

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Abstract

Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with Kosovo Romani (i.e. Roma and Ashkali) forced migrants, NGO workers and volunteers, local politicians and city councillors, civil servants and social workers in Florence and Venice, this thesis examines the complex interplay between discourses, policies, and practices which contribute to the definition of the Romani population as a social and political 'problem' in Italy.

The thesis traces a genealogy of current Italian policies toward Italian and foreign Romani people, which provides the background for investigating how, and to what extent, Kosovo Roma and Ashkali forced migrants are, discursively and socially, constructed as a part of the broader 'Gypsy problem' (rather than as 'refugees') and the implications this framing has on their everyday lives, experiences, and coping strategies.

The thesis also shows that the 'Gypsy problem' is time- and space- specific, and assumes different configurations in Florence and Venice. These are a product of the Italian 'municipalist' political tradition and decentralised administrative structure, as well as of different understandings, approaches, agendas, and actions of local politicians, civil servants and front line bureaucrats.

The examination of the dominant discourse on 'Gypsies' also reveals a strong culturalist bias centred on the idea of the Romani population as inherently nomadic. This characterisation, it is argued in the study, has important policy implications. By framing the Romani population in this way, not only has it become possible for Italian authorities to legitimise the rejection of well-founded claims from Romani displaced people for humanitarian protection; they have also been able to refuse newcomers opportunities for permanent settlement, and to develop and implement public policy which has contributed to the spatial and social segregation of these communities.

The so-called 'nomad camps', an important product of this culturalist logic, epitomise this chain of processes and form a privileged analytical standpoint from which to examine the 'Gypsy problem' in Italy.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

Background

Fellow members of the Lega Nord, my word is revolution! This is the gospel according to Gentilini: the decalogue of the first sheriff major. I want a revolution against illegal migrants. I want a revolution against nomad camps and the Gypsies. I destroyed two [nomad camps] in Treviso. And now there is not even one left. I want to eliminate [Gypsy] kids who steal from elder people. If Maroni [the Italian Minister of Interior] says zero tolerance, I want double zero tolerance (Gianfranco Gentilini, 14 September 2008).

At the *Festa dei Popoli Padani*, a meeting organized in Venice by the right-wing party Lega Nord, Giancarlo Gentilini, senior member of the party and deputy mayor of Treviso in the north east of Italy addressed the crowd with these words¹. The intervention provoked numerous protests and the Public Prosecutor's Office of Venice opened an inquiry against Gentilini on the grounds of instigation to racial hatred. At the time of writing, the investigation is underway but the accused does not appear to be concerned. In a statement to the press, he stated: 'What I said reflects the will of the citizens. It is not racism, but order, discipline and respect for the law' (Gentilini quoted in *Oggi Treviso*, 3 October 2008).

Statements like the one above, often accompanied by appeals to the will of the citizens as a justification for racism, are neither isolated nor unique, nor do they only exclusively concern the current right-wing coalition government (see Sigona and Monasta 2006; Clough Marinaro 2003).

On the contrary, these statements are revealing of how certain discourses are entrenched within Italian institutions, both locally and nationally, and in the public discourse on Romani people. They seem to capture the *zeitgeist* of contemporary Italy, and encapsulate a widespread sentiment that unites representatives on

¹ A video of Gentilini's speech is available at <http://www.osservazione.org>. For a critical discussion on the Northern League see Tambini 2001; Gold 2003; Agnew 1995.

various levels of the main political parties, a large proportion of the media and the majority of public opinion (Monasta 2008; cf. Mammone and Veltri 2008). Research carried out by the Institute for the Study of Public Opinion (ISPO 2008) has shown that the Italians' image of Romani population is extremely negative in comparison to other nationalities and ethnic groups. It also found that this image is grounded on extremely limited knowledge on this population, with regards to their numbers, history, and legal status².

Despite their visibility in public discourse and the frequent recourse by media and politicians alike to a vocabulary of 'invasion' and 'tidal wave' (Arrigoni and Vitale 2008; Sigona 2006, 2008a, 2009a), the Romani population in Italy is small, numbering 140-160,000 people (Scalia 2006) and representing approximately 0.25 per cent of the population of Italy. As a result of two different historical migration flows, nowadays there are two main groups within the Romani population in Italy: Roma and Sinti³ (Viaggio 1997). A little under half of these people have Italian citizenship. The Sinti, settled mainly in the northern Italy, are in the large majority Italian citizens. They tend to live in large family groups in private or publicly owned areas in caravans or mobile houses, and display a strong attachment to what they call 'the Sinti way of living', in which travelling, either real or imagined, is still an important identity marker (Trevisan 2005). Among the Roma there are several different communities: some settled in Italy centuries ago and are Italian citizens, others arrived more recently⁴. More recent arrivals came mainly from former Yugoslavia and Romania. Legally, they are either citizens of an EU member state (EUMS) or are Third Country Nationals (*extra-comunitari* in Italian) (Brunello 1996; Karpati 1969; Sigona 2003; Piasere 2005; Callia et al 2009). Hence, whilst European legislation regulates the rights and duties of EUMS citizens, for non-EU citizens, it is

² Research shows that the image of Romani population in Italy is made by two main components: 47 per cent of Italians see Roma and Sinti as violent people, thieves, and criminals; and 35 per cent associate them with marginalization, degradation, poverty and homelessness (Arrigoni and Vitale 2008).

³ Romani people began to settle in Italy in the fifteenth century. The Sinti arrived mainly by land from the north, while the Roma, who settled in central and southern Italy, came by sea from the Balkans, where they had long lived in the territories of the Ottoman empire (Fraser 1992; Piasere 2004; Vaux Defouletier 1990).

⁴ For an overview of Romani communities in Italy see Piasere 2004; Spinelli 2003; Dell' Agnese and Vitale 2007.

primarily the Italian Immigration Law which has this responsibility. Within the foreign Romani population in Italy, most of whom fled their home country for reasons of war, extreme poverty and racial discrimination, a substantial number lives under the constant threat of being repatriated due to difficulties in renewing a temporary residence permit or to comply with requirements set by Italian immigration legislation (Simoni 2008b; Colacicchi 1996; Schiavone 1997, 1999). In my thesis, I focus in particular on the reception and settlement of one group of foreign Roma: those arrived in Italy during the late 1980s and 1990s from Kosovo as a result of the political, economic, and social disintegration of Yugoslavia. The Kosovo Romani population in Italy is divided in two main groups: Roma and Ashkali.

International public attention on the situation of Roma and Sinti in Italy has increased significantly since November 2007, when the violent murder of an Italian woman by a Romanian Romani immigrant stirred anti-Romani feelings in the country: 'a continuing anti-foreigner outcry unmatched in Italy's recent history' according to Hopper (*The Guardian*, 2 November 2007). This event triggered a number of violent attacks on Romani individuals and in 'nomad camps' throughout Italy and brought the 'Gypsy problem' back to the top of the political agenda (Sigona 2008a, 2008b; Simoni 2008a; Colacicchi 2008; OSCE 2009)⁵.

⁵ A few months later, in the 2008 electoral campaign which led to the victory of the centre-right coalition, the 'Gypsy problem' was high on the political agenda, and the main contenders from both sides tried to assert their 'security' credentials by using zero tolerance rhetoric against 'nomads' and 'nomad camps' (Simoni 2008a, 2008b). For the first time, the electoral manifesto of a mainstream political party, Berlusconi's *Partito del Popolo della Libertà*, refers explicitly to 'combating the illegal nomad settlements and evicting everyone without adequate legal means of support and the right to stay in the country' (quoted in Simoni 2008a: 84). Once elected, the new government, acting upon its electoral promise, issued a stream of highly symbolic policy initiatives to address what was powerfully framed as an 'emergency'. Less than a month after the election, the government issued decree n.122/2008 in which it declares the 'state of emergency in relation to the settlements of nomad communities in Campania, Lombardy and Lazio regions', and successively appointed three special commissioners in charge of implementing all the initiatives needed to overcome the 'emergency', starting with 'monitoring authorised camps where nomad communities are settled and identifying illegal settlements' and 'identification and census of people, including minors, and families residing in camps' (Decree of the Prime Minister, n.122/2008). These measures raised great concern among European and international human rights monitoring bodies, and a number of delegations and missions such as the European Parliament, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Council of Europe were sent to Italy to assess the situation (Amnesty International 2008; Hammarberg 2008; ERRC et al 2008; European Parliament 2008). International pressure forced the Italian government to make some concessions with regard to its heavy-handed initiatives, yet these alterations appeared to be of a decidedly opportunistic nature and limited in their actual impact (Sigona 2009a).

However, neither the racial discrimination against Roma and Sinti nor their socio-economic marginalisation, are new phenomena in Italy. A number of academic and policy reports over the last two decades have expressed serious concerns for the situation of Roma and Sinti (cf. Brunello 1996; Clough Marinaro 2003; Piasere 1991; Rivera 2003; Sigona 2002, 2005; Sigona and Monasta 2006; Però 1999; Bontempelli 2006). In 1999, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) expressed concern 'at the situation of many Roma who live in camps outside major Italian cities' and added that, 'in addition to a frequent lack of basic facilities, living in the camps not only leads to the Roma's physical segregation from Italian society, but their political, economic and cultural isolation as well'⁶. This concern was echoed in the following years by national and international organizations involved in the monitoring of racism and xenophobia (cf. ERRC 2000; Sigona and Monasta 2006). In 2002, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI 2002: 20, see also ECRI 2006) noted how the spatial segregation of a large section of the Romani population in so-called 'nomad camps' 'appears to reflect a general approach of the Italian authorities which tend to consider Roma as nomads who want to live in camps'.

This thesis aims to engage with premises, causes and effects behind the widespread anti-Romani racism in Italy⁷, and to examine, in particular, the relationship between nomad camps and the dominant discourse on Roma and Sinti as nomadic people.

Aims and objectives of the study

Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with Kosovo Roma and Ashkali forced migrants, NGO workers and volunteers, local politicians and city councillors, civil servants and social workers in Florence and Venice, this thesis aims to develop a theoretical understanding of the complex interplay between discourses, policies

⁶ It should be noted that international reports tend nowadays to use the ethnonym 'Roma' to refer to the overall Romani population, including therefore also Italian Sinti, Kosovo Ashkali and other sub-groups.

⁷ According to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) group (1982: 11-2), 'It is not possible to see racism as a unitary fixed principle which remain the same in different historical conjunctures'; rather, 'it has to be located historically and in terms of the wider structures and relations' of the specific society of concern, but also, Cederberg suggests (2005:3), 'empirically grounded in terms of lived realities'.

and practices which contribute to the definition of the Romani population as a social and political 'problem' in Italy. It will offer a detailed analysis of the working and multiple dimensions of the 'Gypsy problem', explore processes of labelling, categorisation and self-categorisation among the 'Gypsies', and locate coping strategies and settlement patterns of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali within this framework.

To achieve this aim, the thesis sets out to trace a genealogy of current Italian policies toward Roma and Sinti, and refugees. This will provide the background for investigating in what ways, and to what extent, Kosovo Roma and Ashkali forced migrants were, discursively and socially, constructed as a part of the broader 'Gypsy problem' rather than as 'refugees' and, importantly, the implications of this framing for their life chances and coping strategies.

Informing my examination will be theoretical contributions from different fields, such as the anthropology of bureaucracy, policy, and the state; the sociology of social problems and labelling theory; critical policy analysis and Foucauldian conceptualisations of power, knowledge and discourse, feminist studies perspectives on agency and processes of subjectivation, and current debates in sociology, politics and geography on camps, citizenship, and spaces of exception.

Another important aim of the thesis is to investigate whether, how, and to what extent the 'Gypsy problem' is time- and place- specific and, more specifically, how this is linked to the Italian 'municipalist' political tradition and decentralised administrative structure (Putnam 1993; Zincone 1999; Stacul 2006). The case studies of Florence and Venice will provide the empirical basis for this investigation, and the standpoints from which to examine the process of problematisation of Romani people along two axes: vertically, observing the different roles of local, regional and national authorities and their interplay⁸; and, horizontally, comparing

⁸ The European and international levels began to play a role in this sphere only recently. The publication of ECRI and CERD reports in the 1990s did not produce any significant response by Italian authorities. The 2007 'Romani emergency' brought the situation of Romani communities in Italy at the forefront of the European debate on

and contrasting two local authorities' approaches to governing the presence of Romani populations in their territory.

Adopting an ethnographic approach will also enable me to examine whether and how understandings, approaches, agendas and actions of civil servants and front line bureaucrats contribute to the definition of the 'Gypsy problem', and what agency they can exert within the dominant discourse on Roma and Sinti.

The analysis of the accounts of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali forced migrants will inform my analysis of the encounter, if any, between two discursive and policy frameworks, the one on 'Gypsy' and the one on 'refugees' in Florence and Venice. Moreover, it will shed light on the ways in which Roma and Ashkali engage with these sets of discourses, policy and practice, and how they adjust to, adapt and/or oppose to them.

A central aim of the thesis is to investigate and shed light on what role, if any, the so-called nomad camps play in the governance of the 'Gypsy problem', and in shaping the lives, social worlds, and opportunities of their inhabitants. This examination will also offer some original contributions to broader debates on the camp and the transformation of modern citizenship.

The analysis of the emergence of the discourse on 'closing down nomad camps' in Italy, and in Florence and Venice particularly, and the different projects developed and implemented in the two cities to achieve this goal, will also contribute to my investigation, offering original insights into processes of strategic labelling and relabelling, as well as on broader transformations of the Italian welfare system.

Finally, in the thesis I employ the label 'Gypsy problem' [in Italian *problema zingari*], a familiar expression in Italian policy and popular jargon, as a short cut to refer to the set of processes and relationships that contribute to define the contours of the problematisation of Roma and Sinti in Italy. This label has an embedded ontological ambiguity: what do politicians, policymakers and others mean when they declare

the raising anti-Gypsyism in Europe and several international and EU agencies sent fact finding missions to Italy (Sigona 2009a; Vitale 2009).

their will to solve the '*problema zingari*'? Do they aim to address the problems that Romani people face or, conversely, the problem that they pose to 'us'? I will argue in the thesis that this label validly captures the ambiguous nature of Italian policy and practice towards this population as it makes possible to reconcile apparently conflicting policy outcomes: on the one hand, security and control, and, on the other, social assistance and the protection of cultural diversity.

Outline of the thesis

This thesis is divided into four main parts and eleven chapters. This section provides a general overview of its structure and contents.

Part 1 provides the historical, theoretical, and epistemological foundations of the thesis.

Chapter 1 is a prologue to the thesis and, sketching the recent history of Romani communities (Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians) in Kosovo, provides a context for understanding and framing of the experiences of Roma and Ashkali in exile.

Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual tools and theories used in the thesis. It focuses on the complexity of the relationship between labelling, policy making and bureaucratic practices, and how these contribute to build bureaucratic identities through which the political system, in its various articulations, categorises and manages 'the Other'. Bureaucrats' and clients' room for manoeuvre and spaces of resistance are also explored, together with an argument for the geographical/historical situatedness of social relations, providing a background to the analysis of nomad camps.

The epistemological framework of the thesis is discussed in Chapter 3. The chapter addresses definitional and operational issues associated with doing an ethnography of the 'Gypsy problem'. The chapter also discusses matters of locations, the scale of the research, and comparability; methodological and ethical concerns involved in doing research on refugees; and the role of the researcher, access to interviewees, and issues of restitution.

Part 2 introduces the discourses, policies and practices governing Romani communities in Italy.

Chapter 4 outlines Italian policy and discourse on 'nomads' from WWII to the early 2000s. It focuses in particular on the 1990s, when the arrival of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali refugees was met by a policy framework characterised, on one hand, by the absence of an adequate asylum system and, on the other, by the recently passed regional laws 'in favour of nomadic culture'.

Chapter 5 analyses the relationship between 'nomads' and nomad camps in Italy and reflects upon the camp as the spatial dimension of the 'Gypsy problem'. Addressing nomad camps respectively from genealogical and geographical perspectives, it provides a framework for interpreting and understanding the ethnographic material discussed in Chapter 10.

Part 3 takes the discussion to the local level, analysing and comparing discourse, policy and practice on 'nomads' and 'refugees' in Florence and Venice. Both Chapter 6 and 7 are divided in three main sections: the first explores public discourse and public policy on Roma before the arrival of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali forced migrants in the late 1990s, and the appearance of nomad camps; the second section focuses on the arrival of Roma and Ashkali and the reception policy and practice adopted by local authorities; and the third analyses the debate which in both cities led to policies aimed at the closing down of camps, and looks at how these policies were implemented. Chapter 8 considers commonalities and differences in the way the local authorities of Florence and Venice engaged with Roma and governed their presence between the late 1980s and early 2000s.

Part 4 focuses on the interactions, visions, representations, practices and agency of the social actors involved in the 'Gypsy problem'. Through the accounts of interviewees, Chapter 9 explores visions, attitudes, motivations and agendas of 'street-level bureaucrats' in Florence and Venice, how these impact on the way they carry out their roles and tasks, and the room for manoeuvring of 'street level bureaucrats' vis-à-vis their institutions. It also considers how the Roma and Ashkali adapt and respond to these visions and practices.

Chapter 10 discusses the link between the dominant discourse on nomads, actual nomad camps, and the everyday lives of camp inhabitants. Through the accounts of Roma and Ashkali migrants on their encounters with the camp, this chapter challenges the assumption that nomad camps are a product of Romani culture. Nonetheless, the focus on the everyday life in/of the camp reveals also the processes of adaptation and adjustment of residents to the camp environment, and the extent to which the camp becomes 'incorporated' in its residents. The chapter also investigates the resources, entitlements and rights of camp inhabitants, as well as their interactions with the state apparatus, and explores what I term the 'comfort of exceptionality'. Finally, it concludes introducing the concept of 'campzenship' to capture the specific form of citizenship produced in/by the camp, and the legacy of the camp on former inhabitants.

Chapter 11 concludes the thesis by summing up the key findings, the contribution to knowledge of the work, and outlining some areas for further research.

PART I. FOUNDATIONS

Part 1 provides the historical, theoretical, and epistemological foundations of the thesis. Chapter 1 outlines the history of the emergence of Roma, Ashkali, and Balkan Egyptians in Kosovo's political arena in the context of changing ethnic relations and political opportunity structures in Yugoslavia. Chapter 2 discusses the conceptual tools and theories used in the thesis, focusing in particular on the relationship between institutional labelling, policy making (and implementation), and coping strategies of subjects. Finally, Chapter 3 explores definitional and operational problems associated with doing an ethnography of the 'Gypsy problem'; discusses methodological and ethical concerns in doing research on refugees; and explores the role of the researcher, access to interviewees, and issues of restitution.

CHAPTER ONE. FROM KOSOVO, YUGOSLAVIA

Introduction

I have known Adem for ten years. He is one of the most vocal and relentless Romani activists I know. I visited him at his home for the first time in April 2005, in a nomad camp in Florence. His home was two caravans and an old van, which he shared with his wife, three sons, a daughter, a daughter-in-law and three grand children. To join together the two caravans there was a tin-roofed patio. It is in this area that, especially during spring and summer, the family used to have meals and to welcome guests.

When I arrived, Adem kindly invited me to sit at the long table outside. His wife Bedria was kneading bread dough at the other end of the table with the help of her daughter-in-law. She briefly interrupted her work to serve us some tea and coffee. Before starting our conversation, Adem apologised for the condition of the camp. It was my first time there and he wanted to make sure that I knew that this was not the kind of place he would like to live in and that the camp was very different from their home back in Kosovo. He also wanted to show me something. I followed him inside one of the caravans. There was hardly space to step inside. The caravan was completely packed with papers, books, memorabilia from Yugoslavia and old and new photos. 'This is my library', he said with pride. We went back to our chairs; he had taken a folder from the library which he opened on the table. It was filled with newspaper articles, leaflets, and photos taken at demonstrations in Florence and of their home town, Mitrovica. One of the photos portrayed their family home, which was bombarded and looted during the 1999 war⁹. However, the centrepiece of the folder – at least with respect to the story I am going to tell in this chapter – was the cover page of an old issue of the weekly 'Paris Match'. On the cover there was a family portrait of Tito and his wife sitting on a bench. Adem commented: 'When

⁹ According to OSCE and Council of Europe (1999), Mitrovica was badly affected by the war with the 65% of its residential buildings heavily damaged or destroyed (see also UNHCR 1999a, 1999b, 2003, 2004).

Tito was in power, our life in Yugoslavia was by far better. Now we do not dare to go back to Kosovo; it is extremely dangerous for us. Here at least we can survive'. This conversation and the striking contrast between the living conditions in the camp and the quest for dignity and respect exuding from the pile of letters, articles, and photos clustered in the derelict caravan prompted me to delve into the history of Yugoslavia and Kosovo, to visit the villages and towns of some of the people I encountered in Florence and Venice, and to start my thesis with this prologue.

Figure 1: Florence, Marshal Tito in the Oلماتello camp.

In attempting to offer an answer to why a person who the majority of Italian society calls 'nomad' and deems to be without homeland was nostalgic of Yugoslavia, this chapter outlines the system of governance of inter-ethnic relations in Yugoslavia and Kosovo and its transformation especially after the death of Marshal Tito in 1980. It traces a recent history of Romani people in Kosovo – before, during and after the 1999 war – and offers an explanation as to why this community fragmented into three main components: Roma, Ashkali, and Balkan Egyptians. Overall, this chapter aims to provide a background against which to frame and

understand the experiences, aspirations, and coping strategies of the Roma and Ashkali forced migrants I encountered during my research. To acknowledge their experiences and histories as individuals as well as communities before displacement is central to understanding the experiences and coping strategies of Roma and Ashkali refugees in exile¹⁰.

Yugoslavism, nationalism and minority politics in post World War II Yugoslavia

In the Balkan region, battles over land, history, and culture have been 'frequent and intense' and a variety of political projects, 'ranging from monocultural nation-state, to multicultural territorial-state-building experiments' (Sofos 1996: 251), have been competing for dominance throughout the past two centuries.

National consciousness, nonetheless, is a relatively recent phenomenon. The long Ottoman rule in the area was organised on the basis of the *millet* – the religious affiliation of the subjects – inhibiting processes of ethnic and linguistic differentiation in the population (cf. Mentzel 2000; Babuna 2000). The idea of nationhood emerged as a product of the nineteenth century Romantic Movement. However, 'alongside the Serbian nationalist movement and its politically less significant Croatian counterpart emerged Yugoslavism (*Jugoslovenstvo*), the doctrine of South Slav unity'¹¹ (Sofos 1996: 254). This 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) took as its model the French nation-state, where a state of equal citizens can create the nation (Ramet 2006: 35-111). Therefore, the Yugoslav idea, just like the Yugoslav state, was not an artificial construct, as is now often claimed, and 'certainly it was not less 'natural' than other national(ist) ideologies, including the Serbian and Croat ones' (Djokić, 2003: 4; Rusinow 2003).

¹⁰ In my research in Italy I did not encounter anyone who would declare him/her as Balkan Egyptian. Moreover, I could not find any reference to them as settled in Italy in academic and policy literature and no public sector or NGO interviewees seemed aware of their existence.

¹¹ For an analysis of the interrelated processes of state-building and national liberation in the territory of former Yugoslavia see Pavkovic, 2001; 2000; Djokic 2003; Rusinow 2003.

The victory of Joseph Broz Tito's People's Liberation Front over the Axis occupying forces in 1945 led to the abolition of the monarchy and, in January 1946, to the adoption of the first post-war constitution that proclaimed the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, the first in the series of people's republics constituted in Eastern Europe on the Soviet model and under Soviet influence.

The 1946 constitution defines Yugoslavia as a federal state of six sovereign republics (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina) and two provinces within Serbia (Vojvodina and Kosovo-Metohija). For Paijić (1995: 162) Yugoslavia is a country of 'hosts and historical guests'. The hosts, or nations (*narod*), are Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins¹². The guests – those with a national homeland in another state, such as Albanians and Hungarians – are instead 'national minorities', with limited cultural rights. No official recognition was granted to Roma at this stage. However, many Roma, who had contributed to the partisan cause, welcomed the birth of Socialist Yugoslavia. For Crowe (1996: 222),

The partisan victory was welcomed by many Rom, since Tito gave brief consideration to the creation of 'a Gypsy autonomous area in Macedonia' as a compensation for their 'fanatical commitment to the partisan cause'. Though this idea never bore fruit, it did pave the way for considerable Rom development in the new Yugoslav state.

In the 1950s, Romani activists became more and more involved in the ranks of the communist party. Cultural initiatives and associations flourished and a monthly newspaper in Romani language (*Romano Lil*) was established in Belgrade.

The founding principles of the new Yugoslavia were: in internal affairs, self-management and equality of all founding nations – 'brotherhood and unity' (*Bratstvo i jedinstvo*) was the slogan used by the leadership to express this principle – and in foreign affairs, after the divorce from USSR in 1948, the strategy of non-alignment¹³.

¹² The 'Muslims' became a 'nation' only in 1961 through the addition of the appellation in the federal census.

¹³ These three pillars were all inspired, Jović argues, 'by the desire to be different not only from interwar Yugoslavia but even more so from the USSR' (Jović 2004: 286).

The principle of equality of all nations dictated that no nation, Serbian or otherwise, could dominate the rest in any way. This was supposed to remove the need or cause for any future national liberation movement within Yugoslavia (Pavkovic 2001). However, although intended 'to mend the fratricidal divisions of World War II', by conceiving the peoples of Yugoslavia metaphorically as 'brothers', the Titoist slogan 'brotherhood and unity' implicitly reinforced the idea that they were distinct entities (Denich 1993; Pavkovic 2001).

The tension between centralisation and devolution was a constant feature of post-World War II Yugoslav political life. The oscillation between these two extremes was recorded in the frequent amendments and occasionally radical rewriting of the constitutional rules of the country, as well as in the alterations of ethnic/national categories in the census over the years¹⁴. The constitutional reform of 1953, which followed Tito's expulsion from the *Comintern*, moves away from the Soviet model and defines Yugoslavia as a community of people whose 'socialist consciousness' supersedes national consciousness and whose aim is 'to create a united Yugoslav national consciousness that will supplant all other national identities' (Mertus 1999: 289). The 'Yugoslav' category appeared in the 1961 census and was embraced in large numbers by the Roma who, lacking official recognition as an ethnic group, were seduced by the egalitarian ethos promoted by Marshal Tito (Crowe 1996).

Ten years later the balance changed and Yugoslavism came under attack. In 1964 at the VIII Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) the idea of 'Yugoslav culture' was publicly contested as assimilationist. In particular, the Croatia leadership denounced 'integral Yugoslavism' as 'a chauvinist policy advanced by hegemonic Serbia' (Vlahovic 1964 cited in Pesic 1996: 12).

Between 1968 and 1974, amendments to the federal Yugoslav and Serbian constitutions expanded the independent authority of Kosovo and Vojvodina. In

¹⁴ In a political system based on a proportional representation of ethnic groups, census and official registers play an important role (Scott 1998). As Kertzer and Arel point out (2002: 1-42), 'the way that a state defines its people in national census have important implications not only for those people's own identities and life chances, but for national political and social processes as well'.

1974, a new constitution codified in 406 articles the changes that had already been taking place with respect to the autonomy of provinces and republics. The two provinces were granted *de facto* the status of sovereign republics, with the only fundamental exception being the right to secede from the federation. The 1974 constitution meant a definitive repudiation of the idea of creating a common Yugoslav identity, towards a more confederative form of state based on an ideology of national communism. The growing confederalisation of the system initiated in the mid 1960s crystallised in the 1974 Constitution, transforming the republican units and provinces into basic actors of the system.

As a consequence, after 1974, the tension between republics and, in particular, between their nation-based communist nomenclatures increased and the alleged conflict between national and federal interests became more and more apparent in political debate and public opinion (Ramet 1992; Pesic 1996).

However, it was only after the death of Marshal Tito in 1980 that, without the unifying charisma of the founding father of Yugoslavia, the mechanism designed by the new constitution started to crack, leaving the country under the 'full and undisputed control' of the republican and provincial communist elites (Pavkovic 2001: 15).

An important corollary of this process was that also the other minorities, and in particular the Roma, had to be given some form of official recognition now that the 'Yugoslav identity' no longer existed as a communal political identity. The recognition as 'ethnic group' in the 1974 constitution marked an important departure for the Roma who became assimilated in this way in the 'ethnic quota' system governing access to key public resources and jobs.

This brief outline of Yugoslavia's history has shown how Yugoslavia and Yugoslavism were contested and fluid concepts, 'understood differently at different times by different Yugoslav nations, leaders and social groups' (Djokić 2003: 4). Moreover, it has also highlighted how 'it is misleading to take the categories of ethnic identity in Yugoslavia as fixed qualities' (Denich 1993: 5); rather these categories (of ethnic identity) were employed as an instrument of state policy, variable according to

changing definitions of the state and of what constituted the state, 'quite apart from how people 'felt' about themselves' (ibid). For Duijzings,

because of these historical experiences of conversion and 'mimicry' (the outward adoption of an identity for the sake of survival), and the consciousness of mixed and composite origins, there is often a high awareness among Balkan inhabitants that most identities should not be taken for granted (Duijzings 2000:5).

In the case of Roma, the discussion has shown how, while they enjoyed a degree of political and social recognition unheard of in other European countries, as a minority 'without territory', they also had to display a significant degree of adaptation to the changing political and institutional opportunity structure and interethnic power relations. However, this process cannot be confined to recent history if, as Marushiakova and Popov (2001: 469) notice,

Tendencies towards religious and ethnic assimilation of the Gypsies by the predominant communities have always existed in the Balkans. These processes, either voluntary or under various types of pressure, have existed since the times of the Ottoman Empire and in more recent times in the ethno-national Christian Orthodox countries.

In the following pages I will show how this process of adaptation and adjustment proved particularly difficult in Kosovo once the relationship between the Albanian-speaking majority and the Serbian minority started to deteriorate rapidly following the constitutional reform of 1974 and the rise to power of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia.

Serbs, Albanians and the others in Kosovo: history as a myth and experience

During the 1999 war Kosovo was represented as a conflict-ridden and divided territory in which two parallel societies had been living side by side over the centuries. Kosovo was a frontier where – beginning with the mythical battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389 – Muslims and Christians have alternatively laid claim to the same land. The war and the growing ethnic tension of the 1990s provided the interpretative frame through which the past of the region was recollected and

narrated (Losi et al. 2001). This led many commentators, for instance, to consider a separation between Serbs and Albanians as inevitable. Conversely, Duijzings (2000:1) claims that 'although the war in Kosovo may cause us to think in terms of irreconcilable differences, one should not forget that boundaries – the territorial as well as the cognitive ones – have often faded in more quiet periods'. In fact, Kosovo has also a history of coexistence. Considerable movements across its ethnic and religious frontiers have resulted in many cultural traits being 'shared across group boundaries, and throughout its history the ethnic and religious barriers have been anything but watertight' (ibid).

Similarly, Blumi suggests that Balkan society and its conflicts are interpreted through old colonial schemata that fail to illuminate current circumstances¹⁵. This has a far reaching impact as it is on this basis that the international community validates its standards and social organisational models which are then imposed on local communities (Blumi 2000).

The literature on the ethnic tensions and conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo is considerable, and reflects a wide spectrum of positions and interpretations characterised by two extremes: those which are pro-Serbian and those pro-Albanian. These extremes have led some commentators to affirm that there are always two truths about Kosovo (Morozzo della Rocca 1999; Mertus 1999; Amore 2006). Kosovo, to put it in Mertus' terms (1999: 4), 'exemplifies a society in which the identities of two competing groups have long been tied to Truths about the other'.

Although Kosovo was populated mainly by Albanians, it was a symbol of nationalist aspirations for both Albanians and Serbs. It was nationalism that led to the rise of Slobodan Milosevic in the 1980s and the official adoption of an extreme Serbian nationalist agenda. And 'once the nationalist agenda had become governmental policy, war became a real possibility' (IICK 2000: 10).

¹⁵ See Todorova's discussion of the concept of 'Balkanism' (1997; 2004).

The mobilisation of myths and legends, together with partisan and conflicting interpretations of the history of the territory, became 'the *hidden transcript* of conflict, the storytelling that serves to define competing identities of the parties in conflict, propelling and intensifying animosities' (Mertus 1999: 10; cf. Bakic-Hayden 2004).

From the early 1970s when Tito decided to discard the idea of creating a homogeneous Yugoslav identity and to encourage more elements of national self-government (Malcolm 1998), the life of Albanians in Kosovo changed. A series of cultural reforms followed and the use of the Albanian language and the study of Albanian history and culture were officially permitted¹⁶. These reforms opened new possibilities for Albanian political aspirations and, more importantly, generated the cultural/pedagogical environment conducive to the formation of a generation of politically-sophisticated activists (Blumi 2003).

But Kosovo was, and to a lesser extent still is, the home also of other ethnic groups whose role in internal Yugoslav affairs has been overlooked in international scholarship. In such a polarised environment, the non-Serbian and non-Albanian minorities had to find their way through changing power relations and had to comply with cyclical requests to display loyalty to the winners. This produced among Romani communities two opposite but interdependent phenomena: the attempt to assimilate into the dominant groups; and the fragmentation of the Romani population into subgroups as an attempt to escape the negative stigma attached to the Gypsy identity (Marushiakova and Popov 2001).

The following sections aim to briefly outline the recent history of Romani communities in Kosovo and the emergence and consolidation next to the Roma minority of two 'new' political subjects: Ashkali and Egyptians.

Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians in Kosovo before, during and

¹⁶ Among these initiatives it is worth reminding: the establishment of an Albanian university in Pristina, the diplomatic rapprochement with Albania, the employment of Albanian-speaking teachers and lecturers, the rapid Albanisation of administration and security, and increased public investment (IICK 2000).

after the 1999 war

'Roma are the forgotten victims' (Galjius 1999; Dérens 1999) of the 1999 war as well as of its aftermath (Sigona 2003, 2009c; Mueller 2008). These communities have lived in Kosovo for centuries. They have contributed to its history and their current circumstances should be seen as part of this history, not as an exception. Yugoslav identity politics and the shifting power relations between federal and national entities impacted on them as much as on the larger ethnic groups and contributed to the determine the trajectories of their political and social mobilization, an example of which is the emergence of Balkan Egyptians and Ashkali in the public arena.

Before

In Kosovo both Serbs and Albanians have denied, forcedly hidden, and occasionally resuscitated the other minorities whenever required by their political agenda. This process did not start with the 1990s. It had roots in policy and practice developed within the framework of Yugoslavia inter-ethnic relations and even earlier in correspondence of the development of ethno nationalisms in the late 1800s.

Before the 1999 war and the mass expulsion of Romani people that followed the return of the Kosovo Albanian refugees in Kosovo, the region had a vast and composite Romani population made of communities speaking respectively Albanian, Romanes and Serbian as their first language. The majority were Muslim, but there were also sizeable communities of Catholics and Orthodox Christians¹⁷ (cf. Crowe 1996; Mattern 2005; Laederich 2006; Cahn 2005).

The earliest known documents attesting the presence of (variously denominated) Romani communities in the Balkan peninsula are from the Middle Ages. A group of *Egyptians* is mentioned in a document dated 1362 as living in Ragusa (present day Dubrovnik), and an even earlier document refers to a group of *Tsiganije* in Prizren in

¹⁷ One of the distinguishing features of the Muslim Roma experience, according to David Crowe (2000), seems to have been the utter unwillingness of other Muslim populations to have anything to do with them.

1348. However, at present the richest information stems from the Ottoman Tax registers dating from the end of the fifteenth century. According to the Tax register, out of roughly 20,000 Romani families, only a dozen were reported as being nomadic. The very large majority were settled and were concentrated in three areas: Thrakia, Macedonia, and Kosovo (Laederich 1999). There were two main groups. The first, and by far the largest one, consisted of the descendents of the early Romani settlers, closely related to the *Arlii Roma* found in Bulgaria, Southern Serbia, and Macedonia. The second wave occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth century – in particular following the abolition of Gypsy slavery in 1855 in Romania – with the arrival of *Gurbeti Roma* from Walachia (present day south of Romania) (Hancock 1997).

Contrary to the common and widespread perception of the community as inevitably poor and living in slums, prior to the war the living conditions of Romani communities in Kosovo did not differ much from the rest of the local populations, making them well integrated in the local social fabric (Laederich 2006). There was a Romani middle class made of school teachers, lawyers, journalists, doctors, engineers, policemen, and traders as well as a less well-off group of unemployed, factory workers and farmers.

No reliable figures are available regarding the Romani population in Kosovo, especially considering these groups went through several waves of more or less voluntary assimilation into the dominant groups. According to activists and NGOs, the Romani population accounted for 5-10% of the overall population¹⁸, with 35,000 living in Pristina alone. However, it is difficult to know for sure the exact numbers, since statistics are politically sensitive – and even more so in a political system based on ethnic quotas on the verge of collapse.¹⁹

¹⁸ Laederich (2006) suggests a higher figure (300,000) based on the sums of the claims made by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian representatives at the Rambouillet talks combined with historical data coming from the Ottoman tax registers.

¹⁹ In its December 1998 bulletin, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC 1998) quotes an article from the Belgrade-based newspaper *Politika* (26 November 1998) in which Ljuran Koka, representative of the *National Community of Roma* in Kosovo, claims that in Kosovo there were 150,000 Roma, around 8% of the two million inhabitants of the province. This figure was confirmed a few days later by the Yugoslav president Slobodan

Turks, Serbs and Albanians working in socialist administrative offices used not only to enter Albanian, Serb and Turkish-sounding family names in birth records but also, as, Romani journalist Orhan Galjus (1999) recalls, to actually manufacture family names of registered Roma. The aim of this practice was to use these communities for the purpose of creating more Turks, Albanians, or Serbs thereby increasing the power of the respective ethnic group in local politics. Another aim, Galjus points out, was to break down any attempt by Roma to mobilize politically as one group, succeeding in this way to divide them in smaller units which were more controllable (idem).

In the 1960s, the proclaimed 'brotherhood and unity' of Yugoslavia was pursued through a combination of strong central government and, especially at the local level, the allocation of resources, jobs, scholarships, and political power according to the demographic weight of each recognised ethnic group. At that stage, Kosovo Romani population enjoyed very limited public recognition and in order to access these opportunities, many opted for more convenient identities. The identification of some Roma with the Albanians was, Galjus (1999) writes, 'a free, positive choice, especially after the Second World War'. Hiding their origin behind more respected identities, these people gained a better chance of survival. However, despite this attempt at 'mimicry', they were never fully integrated nor totally assimilated into the group they had identified with.

The situation in Kosovo began to deteriorate with the rise to power of Milosevic, which brought a radicalisation of the relations between ethnic groups (Laederich 1999)²⁰.

Milosevic in an interview to the *Washington Post* (13 December 1998). But when the war started, new figures were offered to the press from the Serbian authority: non-Serb and non-Albanian ethnic groups *together* made up no more than 8% of the Kosovo population. What had happened in the meantime? In the weeks before December 1998, the Serbian government had tried unsuccessfully to *normalise* the situation in Kosovo by launching, with the strategic involvement of local minority representatives, two political initiatives – the Temporary Executive Council for Kosovo and a Framework for Political Self-Governance. Both initiatives failed and official minority figures were reduced, increasing instead the share of the Serbian minority.

²⁰ For Galjus (1999), instead, it was the demographic boom of the Albanian population in the 1990s that acted as a trigger by altering the power balance between Albanians and Serbs.

In the early 1990s the Romani population was targeted by some Serbian government initiatives aiming at drawing some community leaders into an alliance with the Kosovan Serbs. 'The bait was that through a modest role in governing Kosovo the Roma could for the first time in the history of Kosovo and Serbia enjoy some authority' (Crowe 2000: 110). In reality, few people gained from this alliance and most remained politically mute. According to Cahn and Peric (1999: 6), most people stayed out of politics because they felt trapped between the 'exacting standards of loyalty among the Albanian community' and the 'omnipresent Serbian police'.

During the war: battling truths

In August 1999, during a brief visit to Sarajevo after the March-June 1999 bombardment, Bill Clinton surveyed the result of western statecraft in the Balkans and pronounced himself satisfied. 'Across most central and south-eastern Europe', he affirmed, 'the progress of open societies and open markets has exceeded our most optimistic hopes' (cited in Bacevich 1999: 34). In reference to Bill Clinton's pronouncement, Bacevich (ibid.) observes that 'with little sign of democracy, tolerance or respect for human rights, with one NATO army of occupation propping up the precarious partition of Bosnia and a second bearing witness to the ethnic cleansing of Serbs by vengeful Kosovo Albanians, such a rosy assessment may seem misplaced'. Clinton was just telling his particular truth, one among the many battling for hegemony in the Balkans, 'the one that most Americans happily endorsed' (ibid).

Many commentators saw in the March-June 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo and Serbia 'the first major bombing campaign intended to bring a halt to crimes against humanity being committed by a state within its own borders' (Roberts 1999: 102-123). The Kosovo crisis and the sufferings of 900,000 Kosovo Albanians fleeing in mass from Kosovo aroused great interest and empathy among Europeans as a result of three combined factors: *regionality*, *implicatedness* and *relatedness* (Gibney

1999)²¹. However, despite the massive presence of western journalists in the region, very few people were interested in understanding the plight of those who were neither Serbs nor Albanians (Peric and Demirovski, 2000: 83-96). In other words, these ethnic minorities (Roma, Ashkali, Balkan Egyptians, Gorani, Turks, Bosniaks) were denied the right to be recognised as victims. Being difficult to label, or to fit within a convenient dichotomy (i.e Albanians/Serbs), their existence was denied *tout court* (Sigona 2003)²². As an ERRC researcher put it (Kiuranov 1999:57-58):

The international media packaged NATO's attack on Yugoslavia as an armed humanitarian intervention on behalf of an oppressed minority. This attitude would suggest a heightened interest in everything local that had to do with human rights violations, especially related to ethnicity. Nothing of the sort occurred. The 'ethnic' interest went only as far as covering the cleansing of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo. This act was perpetrated by the 'enemy' and justified the intervention. Any other ethnic issue, no matter how important it would be locally and how many lives were involved, was systematically disregarded, apparently with the aim of not muddling in the public mind the clear case for intervention.

The interest in ethnicity, however, did not fade away after the war. Instead it took a new form, becoming the founding paradigm of the new post-war and internationally-protected Kosovo (cf. Mueller 2008).

From 1998 onwards, as a consequence of the radicalisation of the conflict between Serbs and Albanians, the Romani population came under attack from both sides. The Serb paramilitary troops forced them to dig graves and used them as shields against the NATO bombing campaign. This prompted many to flee alongside the Albanians or, in the case of the *Gurbeti* Roma, to Serbia and Montenegro. Their fate

²¹ Gibney (1999) employs these three terms to capture respectively the correlation between the practical significance of Kosovo and its geographical location in Europe; the impact of the NATO bombing campaign which 'turned what was, at most, a plausible scenario - the mass expulsion of Kosovars - into an immediate and pressing reality'; and the mobilizing force of the shared European identity, 'not least when confronted by extreme suffering'.

²² Mainstream media representation of the crisis was very one-sided, just as it apparently was in 1992 during the Bosnia/Croatia/Serbia conflict's media coverage. Serbs also cracked down on media reporting, enforcing much censorship and had its own propaganda machine in place, often coming out with claims that could not be substantiated. However, a propaganda model was also in place in Western nations to help the NATO war machine (Gowan 1999; Chomsky 1999).

in the refugee columns was no better than in Kosovo and many were even denied access to refugee camps in Macedonia and Albania (Peric and Demiroski 2000).

The number of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian refugees fleeing Kosovo is estimated in the tens of thousands. Their exodus was slow but steady until the end of the NATO bombing in June 1999, when the revenge of Kosovo Albanian returnees caused a significant and rapid outflow.

Once the fighting ended and the hundreds of thousands of Kosovars driven out from their homes returned, they took revenge on all remaining Serbs and Roma. Any town or village with a Roma quarter was attacked, looted, and burned. In fact, even before the Kosovars returned home, they attacked Roma in refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia (Crowe 2000: 112; cf. Cahn and Peric 1999; Polansky 1999).

Cases of violence and discrimination against Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian refugees were registered also in the refugee camps at the outskirts of Podgorica in Montenegro (Dérens 1999) and many were forced to flee again.

As a result of the Kosovo war, the weakest ethnic group in the region became even weaker. Efforts by international troops at protecting the fundamental rights of these communities were generally poor (see Human Rights Watch 1999; OSCE and Council of Europe 1999). But also the main NGOs operating in the area have often failed to deliver of food and assistance of an adequate standard to Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians (Polansky 1999). In the report which followed the joint OSCE – Council of Europe field mission on the situation of the Roma in Kosovo (OSCE and Council of Europe 1999: 2) it is clearly stated that ‘the international community has not been able to protect the Roma, especially after the war and the subsequent return of the ethnic Albanians’.

The failure can furthermore be extended to the media if, as Petrova argues (1999: 5), ‘the media covered the ‘third way’ of Kosovo refugees more as a local curiosity than as a human rights catastrophe’ (Petrova 1999: 5). Similarly, for Kiuranov (1999),

Obscure ethnic idiosyncrasies replaced the clear military and political reasoning. The object was to look for the original causes, the ‘reasons’ for Albanian abuses of Roma.

After

Albanians cannot have two countries in Europe.

(Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica, 11 December 2006)

Despite Kostunica's wish, China's concern, and Russia's opposition in the UN Security Council, on 17 February 2008 the Assembly of Kosovo approved a self-declaration of independence, with the informal support of the US and the majority of EU member states. The declaration came a few months after the diplomatic talks led by the UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari over the final status of Kosovo had proved a consensual solution impracticable.

There are an estimated 35,000 to 40,000 Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians currently residing in independent Kosovo. Gjakove/Djakovica, Prizren, Ferizaj/Urosevac, Fushe, Kosove/Kosovo, Polje, Obiliq/Obilic, Mitrovica/Mitrovice, Peja/Pec, and Gracanica host the largest communities, whilst about 100,000 live abroad²³.

All available social and economic indicators underline the severely disadvantaged position of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians in Kosovan society today. The UNDP Human Development Report (2004) reveals that per capita income for the Roma Ashkali and Egyptian population amounts to about one third of that of the rest of the population, with 36% of the communities living in conditions of extreme poverty (1 USD a day) and almost 60% unemployed. Moreover, if employed, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians occupy primarily lower level positions. Of particular concern is the situation in the education sector (UNDP 2006), with the percentage of illiterate persons among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities well above the rest of the population (16%), a situation which has been deteriorating in the last 15 years as a result of political instability and war.

²³ Around 45,000 to 50,000 Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians live in Serbia (23,000 as registered IDP), 35,000 are in Germany with temporary status (*duldung*) and around 10,000 live as refugees in Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. An unaccounted number lives as refugees, illegal migrants or migrant workers all over Western Europe. By October 2007, 6,899 Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians had returned to Kosovo since January 2000 (UNHCR 2007).

The chimera of a peaceful and equal multiethnic Kosovo, promoted by EU and US politicians and UN technocrats, clashes with the reality of poverty and social segregation of thousands of Kosovan Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (Mueller 2008).

Since 1999 the situation of these communities in Kosovo does not seem to have much improved despite the claim of some EU states, which seem keen to repatriate exiled Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians to Kosovo as soon as possible²⁴.

Post-war Kosovo is a territory marked by enclosed spaces and fault lines. Walls, barbed wire, and check points define which spaces are accessible to which people, according to their ethnic affiliations. KFOR forces still patrol access to minority enclaves and IDP camps. The inhabitants of these areas are either those who never left the country or those who 'voluntarily' repatriated from countries of asylum, but could not return to their homes²⁵. In present-day Kosovo, the individual exists only as a member of an ethnic group – borderline positions are not admitted – and their experience is incorporated, but at the same time silenced, in the generic collective (Sacchetto 2004). The discourse of ethnicity, Rahola points out (2003: 132-162), has become the dominant discursive order, if not the only possible one, in the 'pacified' Kosovo. Ethnic categorisations are inscribed in the experience of everyday life of ordinary Kosovars. They define the social, political and geographical boundaries in which individuals can operate and, in turn, are reified by those experiences.

Nowhere in Europe is there such segregation as Kosovo. Thousands of people are still displaced and in camps. Nowhere else are there so many 'ethnically pure' towns and villages scattered across such a small province. Nowhere is there such a level of fear for so many minorities that they will be harassed simply for who they are. And perhaps nowhere else in Europe is at such a high risk of ethnic cleansing occurring in the near future – or even a risk of genocide (Baldwin 2006: 24)

²⁴ In 2000, four Ashkali men were killed within 24 hours of 'voluntarily' returning from Germany to their homes in the village of Doshevc/Dosevac. In March 2004, attacks led by Kosovo Albanians caused at least 30 civilian casualties, 900 civilians injured, 800 houses and 35 religious buildings damaged or destroyed and more than 4,000 people displaced.

²⁵ In January 2003, UNHCR (2003:3) states that 'the return of RAE remains minimal and is often characterised by secondary displacement and relocation to a few already overcrowded locations', namely IDP camps or KFOR patrolled Serbian ethnic enclaves (see also Human Rights Watch 2004).

Public identities and survival strategies: Roma, Ashkali, and Balkan Egyptians in divided Kosovo

Romani activists and intellectuals tend to regard the emergence of Egyptians and Ashkali in the public sphere as an attempt by some members of the Romani community to escape negative stereotypes and the social stigma attached to Roma. These attempts were actively supported by the Albanian and Serbian leaderships that did not want the Roma to organise politically as one group. This line of argumentation touches the core of a sensitive and debated issue, namely the endogenous or exogenous (to the Romani family) origin of groups such as (Balkan) Egyptians and Ashkali, and the *legitimacy* of the identity claims of these 'new' entities.

Among Roma intellectuals in Kosovo and abroad, it is implicitly assumed that the existence of one Romani people and the creation of these communities is merely opportunistic. For some scholars (Marushiakova and Popov 2001; Marushiakova et al. 2001; Duijzings 1997; Duijzings et al. 1997; Trubeta 2003; Uhlik 2004), the appearance in the public arena of Balkan Egyptians and Ashkali – the former with the inclusion in the national census in 1990 and the latter only in 1999 with the participation at the Rambouillet talks (February and March 1999) – cannot be explained simply as the result of a straightforward opportunistic choice taken by Albanian-speaking Roma following, more or less voluntarily, the instruction of the Serbian authorities. Instead, they suggest approaching these phenomena as an expression of that fluidity of ethnic identities described earlier, where history and myth are always open to contestation and alternative truths. In Marushiakova and Popov's words (2001: 466):

History and folklore traditions have a special place in the life of the Balkan nations, where the processes of ethno-national development began later than in Western Europe [...], and are still active now. History here is not so much a science as part of the national mythology [...] which often makes use of their substance and arguments to explain contemporary problems.

Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians do not represent an exception to this situation. Etiological legends reflect the power relations between the dominant cultures and

that of the Roma. In them, in particular in the so-called *Egyptian* cycle, the question of the origin of the Balkan Egyptians as a people is a primary issue where the answer is sought on the level of folklore because, 'unlike the other Balkan nations, Gypsies do not have official and institutionalized science and education, which is why the answers to this question have remained on this level for centuries' (ibid.).

The search for a recognition of Gypsies as a people went through some crucial stages during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the attempt to establish the *Egyptian* origin as a 'scientific' truth was supported by a growing civil movement of the emancipation of this community. In the early twentieth century, the thesis supporting the Indian origin of this people gradually began to penetrate in the Balkans and was incorporated, sometimes hybridised with the Egyptian one, in the etiologic legends on the origin of Gypsies. It was at this point that the ethno-label *Roma* began to be in use.

However, the key issue under debate is not the real or imagined origin of the Balkan Egyptians from Egypt, or if the Egyptians and Ashkali are part or not of the Romani family – a point that no scholars have seriously disputed²⁶ – but 'whether the disputed entity is entitled to participate as an actor within the national arena, and in what position' (Trubeta 2005: 72) and how the current process of identity making is developing and will consolidate in the future.

The process of emergence in the public arena of the Balkan Egyptians started in the early 1970s as a result of the gradual confederalisation of Yugoslavia and the increased recognition of nations and nationalities as the founding units of the confederal state. The approval of the 1974 Yugoslav constitution (Art. 166, 170) which established the right of every citizen to declare their ethnic belonging marked a turning point. However, in the 1981 census, despite the fact that many declared themselves Egyptians (the ethno-denomination varied slightly from republic to republic), the final results did not acknowledge this presence, including them either in the category 'other' or with the Roma. Egyptians mobilized and made a petition

²⁶ For an opposite view see Zemon, 2006.

which collected a large number of signatures. The protest proved to be successful and ten years later Egyptians became one of the official ethnic categories in the census.

A central moment in this process happened in 1990 when in Pristina the inaugural meeting of the Association of Egyptians of Kosovo, which was attended also by representatives of the Egyptian embassy, was held. The principal goal of the newly constituted association was to promote the interests of the Egyptian community and to protect it from the risk of Albanisation, a process to which the members felt they had been subject over the years. The Yugoslav federal government strongly supported the initiative and the Egyptians gained a certain degree of official recognition. The visibility also impacted on the result of the 1991 census, which shows a 0.2% of the population of Yugoslavia as Egyptians, numbering 100,000 Egyptians in Kosovo alone.

An important stage in the consolidation of the Egyptians and Ashkali identities in the public domain was the participation of their representatives at the Rambouillet peace talks in February 1999 on the side of the Serbian authorities. This episode is also particularly significant as it is used by Kosovo Albanians to justify the persecution of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians as collaborators of the Serbs. Although for many, this was just another instance of the political manipulation of Romani people by the Serbian authority who used them in an attempt to show the alleged hegemonic threat represented by an Albanian-ruled Kosovo (Dérens 2003), it was also an opportunity to gain international visibility. In fact, this was the first step of the internationalisation of Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians which, since the war, also found an important support in the newly formed Balkan Egyptian diaspora (Trubeta 2005: 71) and found even more recognition in the consolidation, after few years of mixed use, of the acronym 'RAE' by the international organisations working in Kosovo.²⁷ For Rahola (2003: 148),

²⁷ Up until summer 2000, Ashkali and Egyptians do not appear in the quarterly reports of OSCE and UNHCR on Kosovo that generically refer to Roma. In the fifth report, published in spring 2000, they got an explicit mention; although only in the next report, the sixth (June-September 2000), they did become fully fledged 'ethnic

The way in which this label becomes established and spread in the use of officials as well as in the everyday speech [...], significantly reflects the type of social interactions which are absolutely hegemonic in Kosovo at present.

Conclusion

The process of state formation for Yugoslavia former republics has been difficult and often traumatic. Engaged in defining, imagining, and inventing the foundations of the new states, in which the nation and the state ideologically coincides, the elites of these countries are facing again the same dilemma Tito tried to answer with 'Yugoslavism': how to make sense of a territory where different peoples have lived together for centuries under the Ottoman rule. The experience of these years shows how difficult it is for countries which claim their right to exist on the coincidence between the nation and the state to recognise and value the presence of ethnic minorities (Basic 2001). The situation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in present-day Kosovo is a dramatic example of this. Moreover, the case of these communities can serve as a magnifying lens through which to observe how the discourses of ethnicity and identity are shaped and reshaped in relation to political and geopolitical projects, and raise questions on the nature of the so called humanitarian wars (Kurth 2001).

Romani people have lived in Kosovo for centuries. Since the nineteenth century they have been under pressure for assimilation and aligning to one or the other of the main ethnic groups. Compressed between two parallel social and political systems, Roma adapted, developing various and sometimes diverging strategies of survival. In the last two decades, this pressure has become unbearable. 'Their loyalty was bid over in a conflict which tolerated no neutrality. Roma were forced to choose a side in a conflict in which there was no Romani side' (Cahn and Peric 1999: 6). Nowadays, the consequences of this situation are visible in the quasi absence of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians in Kosovo.

minorities'. As is evident, the implications of this change are far from purely grammatical, rather they are primarily practical.

The aim of this prologue was twofold: to provide a background for the Kosovo Roma and Ashkali migrants and refugees I encountered in Italy which would help to explain their nostalgia for Yugoslavia and their realisation that there is no future for them in the new Kosovo; and to introduce some of the key themes of the thesis. Providing 'the nomads' with a history and a geography is paramount for theoretical, epistemological, and ethical reasons. As scholars in diaspora and transnational studies have noted (Castles 2003; Cohen 1997, 1998; Griffiths 2002; Lavanex 2005; Vertovec 2001; Wahlbeck 1997), in order to analyse any specific forced migration situation there is a need for a historical understanding of both the sending and receiving societies based on a holistic approach which frames the specific case in the broader social relations at various spatial levels. The complexity of the relationship between country of origin and country of asylum and how it is reflected in several aspects of the everyday life of forced migrants is central in the work of the Algerian sociologist Sayad (2004) who contends that discourses of migration focus on the situation of 'immigrants' – meaning, on how receiving countries view immigration as their own social problem – and argues for research to begin at an earlier stage in order to escape an inherently colonial view of migration. Furthermore, to acknowledge the individual and collective past of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali is a crucial step in order to understand their responses to current crises, since the social security mechanisms that refugees and migrants employ are largely based on precedents (Kibreab 1993) but also a way of limiting the traps of 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer and Schiller 2002; see also Brettell 2003).

Finally, the emergence and consolidation of Ashkali and Egyptian public identities and of the acronym RAE in post-conflict Kosovo should be taken as symptomatic of the fact that the public identity of Romani communities in Kosovo continues to be negotiated and contested and that Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians, now as in the past, have to adapt and adjust their claims to the demands of more powerful political players. The Italian case will confirm how the conflict over labelling and representation has followed Roma and Ashkali also in exile.

CHAPTER TWO. LABELLING, POLICY AND IDENTITY

Introduction

How can new ways of classifying open up, or close down, possibilities of human action? How do classifications of people affect the people classified, how do we change in virtue of being classified, and how do the ways in which we change have sort of feedback effect on our systems of classifications themselves? (Hacking 2002: 99)

These questions raised by the philosopher Ian Hacking in an essay entitled 'Making up people' encapsulate some of the main themes of this chapter. However, whilst Hacking's concern is 'philosophical and abstract' (Hacking 2002:100), my concern, as a social scientist, is to define a conceptual framework and a methodology which would enable me to explore on the ground 'the social operations of naming and the rites of institution through which they are accomplished' (Bourdieu 1991:105), and examine how labels affect the people labelled and shape everyday lives, life chances, and spaces of political and social participation.

The overall aim of this chapter is to define and develop the conceptual tools and theories that will inform my analysis of the 'Gypsy problem' in Italy. Rather than confining the discussion within a pre-existing theoretical framework and disciplinary tradition, this chapter aims to engage with concepts and approaches developed in different disciplines and areas of research around the link between institutional labelling, policy making (and implementation), and coping strategies of the labelled subjects.

The focus is on the complexity of the relationship between labelling and policy, and on the role they both play in the building of bureaucratic identities through which the political system, in its various articulations, manages and categorises 'the other'. The objective is to explore, in Zetter's words (1991: 40), 'how an identity is formed, transformed and manipulated within the context of public policy, and especially, bureaucratic practices' and how individuals manage to adapt, adjust to, and/or contest these processes.

This theoretical understanding will inform my examination of the encounter between Italian authorities (at national, regional, and local levels) and Kosovo Roma and Ashkali, and assist my investigation into how the former managed to incorporate Roma and Ashkali forced migrants into the pre-existing discursive and policy frame on 'nomads', and how the latter understood, adapted to, reacted to, or resisted this incorporation.

A brief introduction to the debate on labelling and its origin and application in the study of public policy and bureaucratic practice will open the chapter. The discussion should be seen as part of a broader social constructivist theoretical framework²⁸.

In the first part of the chapter, I shall develop the discussion on institutional labelling along three vectors, namely a) the relation between labelling, power and discourse; b) the institutionalisation of labels through policy making, and c) the role of labelling as a key component in the construction of 'social problems'. In the second part, the focus will shift towards the object/subject of labelling and public policy and I shall discuss the room for manoeuvre of subjects and their agency *vis-à-vis* state officials and bureaucratic practices, as well as the agency of state officials within the bureaucratic apparatus. The third and final section reflects upon the spatial dimension of social interactions and, in particular, argues for paying attention to the placing of the processes of subjectification.

The chapter's tripartite structure provides the conceptual framework, but also the narrative structure for the analysis of the case studies in Part 3 and 4 of the thesis in which, respectively, I address the construction of the 'Gypsy problem' in Venice and Florence looking at labelling, framing, and policy making, and explore issues of agency, structure and spatiality through the accounts of interviewees.

²⁸ The overall focus of social constructivism is to reveal the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the creation of their perceived reality. It involves looking at the ways social phenomena are created, institutionalised and 'naturalised'. In 'The social construction of what?' (1999), Hacking offers an overview of the various streams of research which goes under the loose label 'social constructivism'. To show how in vogue are currently terms like 'social construction' and 'constructivism', Hacking mentions sixty-odd items that have been recently described in print as socially constructed.

Labelling: a background

Whilst this chapter is mainly concerned with the forms, modes and impacts of institutional labelling, before moving into this more specific arena I shall briefly outline the background of the labelling approach. The labelling approach emerged in the early 1960s in the field of sociology of deviance, and towards the end of the decade was for a brief period²⁹, the dominant paradigm in the discipline. This brief outline aims to offer some insights into the subsequent development of the concept and its application in other areas of study.

A key figure in the history of the concept of labelling is the sociologist Howard Becker, who in 1963 published a seminal work entitled 'Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance'. *Outsiders* introduced what became *improperly* known as 'labelling theory' in sociology. The central tenet of this approach is that social reality is conditioned, stabilized, or even created by the labels we apply to people, actions, and communities. The main aim of the original proponents of this perspective, however, was not to provide an etiological explanation of deviance, which critics had pointed out as a weakness of the approach, rather they wanted – as Becker (1973: 179) remarked in a later edition of *Outsiders* – 'to enlarge the area taken in consideration in the study of deviant phenomena by including in it activities of others than the allegedly deviant actor'. The very definition of this approach as a theory was rejected by Becker and others who saw instead their work as 'a way of looking at a general area of human activity' (Becker 1973: 181; see also Goode 1975) within the framework of symbolic interactionism³⁰.

Responding to critics who accused the interactionist approach of being 'value-free' and establishmentarian (cf. Liazos 1972), Becker claimed his approach to be truly radical and progressive. 'By making moral entrepreneurs (as well as those they seek

²⁹ For Goode (1975: 570), 'by the early 1970s the antilabelling stance became almost as fashionable as labelling had been a decade earlier'.

³⁰ The key tenet of symbolic interactionism is that people 'act toward things based on the meaning those things have for them'; and these meanings 'are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation' (Blumer 1969: 179-192). The term 'symbolic' refers to the underlying linguistic foundations of human group life, while the term 'interaction' refers to the fact that people do not act toward one another, but interact with each other (Denzin and Lincoln 2000).

to control) objects of study', the labelling perspective, he argued, 'violate[s] society's hierarchy of credibility' and 'question[s] the monopoly on the truth [...] claimed by those in positions of power and authority' (Becker 1973: 207).

Three elements of this outline of the original formulation of the labelling approach are particularly relevant for the subsequent discussion: 1) labelling is not a theory *stricto sensu*, therefore it is not exclusive or holistic; 2) labelling is radical and progressive in its questioning and deconstructing the *truth* of dominant groups; and 3) labelling acknowledges the practices of resistance and the agency of labelled individuals and groups.

In 1980s the labelling approach was imported into development studies by a group of scholars led by Schaffer (1984) and Wood (1985) who examined the particular kind of labels which arise in development policy areas as an aspect of the donative political discourse. However, it was not a mere translation of the concept from one area of study to another; rather, these scholars engaged in a substantial redefinition of the concept, which benefited from the incorporation of some insights and ideas coming from the work of Foucault (1979, 1980) and Goffman (1968a, 1968b, 1972). Another major contribution to the reshaping of labelling came from Zetter, whose work detailed the conceptual tools and stages of bureaucratic labelling, offering a valuable instrument to researchers in the field of refugee studies (Zetter 1985, 1988, 1991, 2007). The conceptual framework of this dissertation builds upon this latter development of the labelling perspective and attempts to expand its reach by (re)engaging, on the one hand, with Foucault and post-structuralist literature and, on the other, with developments in sociology of social problems and public policy analysis.

Seeing like a state³¹: labelling as state power

All social interactions require labelling (Goffman 1972), but definitional power is socially distributed, and so not all have equal power to assign labels and make them stick. 'The imposition of a recognised name' – Bourdieu argues – 'is an act of recognition of full social existence which transmutes the thing named. The fate of groups is bound up with the words that designate them: the power to impose recognition depends on the capacity to mobilize around a name' (Bourdieu 1986: 480-81).

By structuring the perception of social actors, labelling 'helps to establish the structure of the world, and does so all the more significantly the more widely it is recognized, i.e. authorized' (Bourdieu 1991:105). The key issue to address, therefore, is not *whether* people are labelled but *which* labels are created, *how* they consolidate or are contested, *whose* labels prevail to define a policy frame, and *with what* effects. This section attempts to articulate and explore the implications of such questions.

Labelling, framing, discourse, and power

The content of labels embodies the process of labelling. An analysis of content can reveal the complexities concealed behind the labels as well as the power relations connecting the giver and the bearer. Labels, in fact, 'arise out of a structure in which ruling classes, politicians, bureaucrats, social scientists, agency officials and social workers [...] interact with each other' (Wood 1985: 11) and can be attached and incorporated strategically into competing discursive frames (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou 1998) which are shaped by the interactions – 'actions and reactions' (Kastoryano 2002: 15) - between different actors. This approach to labelling echoes developments in social movement literature, in which the concept of 'framing' is shifted from the cognitive dimension (Goffman 1975) to the political, denoting 'an active, process-derived phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the

³¹ The title of this section is inspired by Scott's work (1998) 'Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed'.

level of reality construction' (Benford and Snow 2000: 614; see also Naples 2003; Vermeersch 2005).

Labels reflect power relations, and an observation of the multiplicity of routes by means of which power is articulated through specific labels – in my case those associated with the construction of Romani communities as a social problem – can shed light on issues of control, regulation, and management of groups and individuals in present societies and offer routes to disclose the sites and modalities at which some form of resistance is possible (Weedon 1987).

Underpinning my argument is an idea of power and knowledge based on the work of Foucault, where power's condition of possibility is its being always ontologically 'local and unstable' (Foucault 1979: 92-93) and the production of knowledge is 'linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it and to effects of power which induce and which extend it' (Foucault 1980: 131). Each society, Foucault argues, produces a 'regime of truth' which encapsulates its beliefs, values, and mores as well as defining the boundaries of 'normality' and 'abnormality' (Foucault 1977, 1980)³².

The analysis of labelling processes, I would argue, can become a way of deconstructing processes of normalisation by which it becomes possible, for example, to discriminate between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrants and refugees. Problematising 'the normal' becomes a way of exposing the political in the apparently non-political³³. This has important repercussions on the debate in refugee studies where scholars have investigated the ways in which the humanitarian regime produces refugees as depoliticised subjects (Malkki 1997b; Chimni 2000; Harrell-Bond 1986; Hyndman 2000). The depoliticisation of refugees happens in two ways: at the micro-level, by neglecting and/or denying the importance of the political in their experience of exile (Essed et al. 2004); and at the

³² For Butler, Foucault's regime of truth 'offers a framework for the scene of recognition, delineating who will qualify as a subject of recognition and offering available norms for the act of recognition' (Butler 2005: 22).

³³ Ferguson describes the processes by which development policy manage to de-politicise and de-historicise the situations they address and define development aid an 'anti-politics machine' (1990).

macro-level, by covering up with the discourse of humanitarianism the responsibilities and involvement of the West in generating conflict and forced migration (cf. Zetter 1999; Castles and Miller 2009; Zolberg and Benda 2001; Richmond 1994; Cohen and Layton-Henry 1997).

Investigating *which* labels are created, *how* they are consolidated or are contested, *whose* labels prevail to define a policy frame, and *with what* effects, will help to shed light on labelling processes. This investigation will also identify and capture the specific interests and values they represent in their claim for hegemony. Hegemony in Gramsci's conceptualisation (1971) may be defined as an organising principle that is diffused by the process of socialisation into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population it becomes part of what is generally called *common sense* 'so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things' (Boggs 1976: 39)³⁴. However, hegemony should not be understood in terms of a single dominant ideology, instead, Hall argues, its very success lies in its multi-faceted (but also invisible) character. It is not just that hegemony partially fixes the meaning of the social but also the other way round: social patterns become hegemonic meaning (Hall 1988).

Hall's view takes us back to Foucault's definition of power as diffuse, relational, unstable, and productive³⁵:

Power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere [...] Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (Foucault 1980:93).

³⁴ For Laclau and Mouffe, who deny any notion 'of a *unique* space in which the political is constituted' (1985: 152), hegemony, rather than 'an irradiation of effects from a privileged point', can be defined as discursive politics that at best 'partially fixes' the meaning of social relations.

³⁵ 'if power were never anything but repressive, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weight on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse' (Foucault 1980: 119).

In Foucault's conceptualisation, the relation between power and knowledge, in his terms 'power/knowledge', is mediated by discourses. According to Foucault, discourse cannot be reduced to an ideological reflection; rather, it is to be thought of as itself a battlefield.

In this work, I understand discourse in the sense developed by the post-structuralist tradition and Foucault in particular, whose work puts forward a theory of language and social power which pays detailed attention to the institutional effects of discourse and its role in the constitution and governance of individual subjects. Labelling is considered here as an element of discourse. Discourses exist in the social practices of everyday life and are embedded and constitutive of the very physical layout of our institutions. They refer to 'ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them' (Weedon 1987:108).

Power is invisible, diffused, and embedded in discourse. It controls thought processes and closes off the possibility of thinking of alternatives. In turn, discourse defines the limits of acceptable speech (Butler 1997). It works 'to define and to enable, and also to silence and to exclude [...] endorsing a certain common sense, but making other modes of categorizing and judging meaningless, impracticable, inadequate or otherwise disqualified' (Milliken 1999: 229; cf. Mooji 2003).

A specific discourse does not operate in a void; it is part of, and interacts with, the system of discourses – discursive formations or coalitions (Hajer 1995) – that forms an overall societal discourse. In this process of negotiation, meaning is relationally constructed and it stays open to challenge. Discourse is socially constructed and thus has no essentialist meaning. The same discourse may change political sides, being re-appropriated and endlessly modified. In other words, specific discourses are not tied to the subject; rather, the subject is a social construction of the discourse (Foucault 1977)³⁶.

³⁶ This conceptualisation of the relationship between subject and discourse has significant points of contact with work by the French Marxist philosopher Althusser (1971: 173-176) who discusses ideology as 'lived experience'

The process of ascribing meaning to the physical and social worlds is subject to constant change and instability. It is a fragile chain of recursive statements that can be endlessly amended (Diez 2001; Simhandl 2006). Policy-making is one of the processes through which power relations are negotiated and reflected in the social world. As we shall see more in detail in the following section, labels participate in this process from an early stage by defining the boundaries of the issues at stake and thus contributing to set the agenda. Furthermore, through the policy-making process the label is consolidated and reified, and produces 'effects of realities' (Foucault 1984).

The institutionalisation of labels: politics in policy process

Modern mastery is the power to divide, classify and allocate (Bauman 1991: 15)

The analysis of policy processes has attracted a wider and more systematic interest in policy studies in the last twenty years. It is a blend of political science, sociology and anthropology, and its subject matter is the way in which policy is given shape in concrete historical processes. Policy process research 'does not assume that policies are 'natural phenomena' or 'automatic solutions' resulting from particular social problems, and it does not privilege the state as an actor fundamentally different from other social actors' (Mooji 2003: 3). It is possible to detect two main trends in the literature on policy process and discourse. The first is concerned with the overall notion of policy and discusses how policy discourse is socially constructed around ideas of rationality, instrumentality, efficiency, and effectiveness. Policy appears therefore as a technique of control which operates by creating sectors, categories, and protocols, which are subsequently perceived as natural boundaries within a social reality (Schaffer 1984). Following this approach, Shore and Wright (1997) regard policy as a 'political technology' through which people are governed.

and points out how 'individuals are always-already subjects' as 'the category of the 'subject' is constitutive of ideology, which only exists by constituting concrete individuals as subjects'. For an insightful discussion of conflicts, overlaps and possible encounters between theory of discourse and theory of ideology see Lemke (2002) and Purvis and Hunt (1993) who proposes, based on Hall (1988), to employ ideological analysis to focus upon the effects of discursive practices.

Policies govern, not only because they 'impose conditions, as if from 'outside' or 'above' [but also because they] influence people's indigenous norms of conduct so that they themselves contribute, not necessarily consciously, to a government's model of social order' (Shore and Wright 1997:6). Policies, hence, act *on* people, but also *through* people.

The second main trend in the literature on policy process and discourse focuses on specific policy areas and pays attention, through a micro-level investigation, to the way in which some discursive frames have become dominant. Power and power relations are central to these analyses that aim to reveal the various techniques through which policy discourse operates, including labels (Wood 1985), metaphors and other stylistic devices, policy narratives (Roe 1994), and styles of argumentation (Fischer and Forester 1993).

Both these trends illustrate the inherently political nature of the policy process. Policies, Shore and Wright argue, 'are codifications of norms and values; charters for action; blueprints for future society and guides to conduct and practice [...] At the same time policies connect ideals and institutions with the individuals and communities who may be the objects of policy, or the instruments through which it is made effective' (1997: 476).

Institutional labelling, as an authoritative act of designation and classification, is a necessary aspect of public policy and a structural component of policy discourse, and plays an important role in the process of creating social structures. Labelling is an institutional device for ordering and managing situations which are ambiguous and ambivalent (Hajer and Laws 2006). In *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Bauman 1991:1), Bauman defines ambivalence as the 'possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category'. The task of the policy makers is to determine how to act. Thus ambivalence, by confounding choice, is a central concern of their work. Being able to read a situation is a crucial problem in policy making as well as, more generally, in statecraft. 'State simplifications' are like maps that are not intended to 'successfully represent the actual activity of the society they depict' but to represent only that slice of it that is of interest for the official observer' (Scott 1998: 3). The term 'simplification', the author clarifies, is understood in two ways:

first, the work of civil servants must aim to identify categories which are replicable across many cases; second, the grouping of synoptic facts necessarily entails collapsing or ignoring distinctions that might otherwise be relevant' (ibidem).

However, this process of simplification in which labels play an important role is inherently political. 'Assigning a term to a concept is not an innocent act antecedent to politics; it is not a prelude to politics but a dimension of politics itself' (Connolly 1974: 3). Labels embed politics into the policy making process, concealing it behind the normalising discourse of bureaucracy (Hastings 1998).

To endorse an approach to policy making which recognises the involvement of the policy process in promoting selective and contingent accounts of the nature of the social world helps to deepen our understanding of the political element often implicit in the construction of policy problems. It requires us to move beyond the recognition that social problems are socially constructed towards an 'analysis of the ways in which particular constructions of social problems are used for particular (political) purposes' (Hastings 1998: 194). The following section develops this argument further, focusing on the construction of social problems and its political and policy implications in sociological and policy studies literature.

The discursive construction of social and policy problems

The same social condition will be defined by some as a social problem and by others as an agreeable and fitting state of affairs (Merton 1966: 786)

The main task of this section is to review the relevant literature concerning policy and social problems, and to identify and describe how different disciplinary fields, in particular policy studies and the sociology of social problems, have approached the subject matter, pointing out the presumptions and assumptions of each approach and their cross-fertilisations.

In policy studies, adapting Bacchi's taxonomy (1999), it is possible to identify two broad categories as far as the approach to 'problems' is concerned. The first one includes, although with some substantial differences, technical rationalist and political rationalist approaches which share a broad focus on *problem solution* and decision making.

For Hawkesworth (1988:13), both technical rationalists and political rationalists, despite marked differences in methods, approaches, and models, support an idea 'that the techniques of policy analysis can contribute to democracy by generating usable knowledge for decision-makers'. However, technical rationalists tend to assume that there is a discrete phase at the outset of the policy process in which values and objectives are clarified. For them, 'problems' are somehow given, and the task of the policy analyst is to identify them.

Political rationalists, by contrast, object to the idea that policy is a straightforward matter of finding technical solutions to readily identified problems. They emphasise the role played by politics and shared values in decision making, and endorse measures aimed at facilitating the access of less powerful groups to the process of decision making. In this perspective we observe a shift from an analysis which produces decisions to the politics which leads to decisions. Rein and Schön clarify this point: 'in policy development one seldom starts from a consensual definition of the problem to be solved [...] Policy development is essentially about a process of *problem setting*' (1977: 235). In other words, political rationalists shifted from an idea of problem identification to one of problem definition. For Dery (1984: 4),

The very notion of problem definition suggests a constructionist (rather than objectivist) view; that is, problems do not exist 'out there' [but are rather] the product of imposing certain frames of reference on reality.

However, despite this move towards what can be termed a moderated constructivist epistemology, the idea of policy studies and policy analysis as a pragmatic and solution-oriented intellectual exercise is still dominant. In 'Problem definition in policy analysis', Dery (1984: 38) elaborates on this point by stating that:

[An approach] not normally concerned with the production of administratively workable and politically realistic ideas for solving social problems' is of no interest for policy analysts whose task is to 'avoid defining problems in a way that will render them insoluble.

This position marks a distance from those in policy studies who have embraced the discursive turn brought by post-structuralism, for whom it is important to investigate what is left out when problems are defined in this way and to draw

attention to 'the process by which problem representations impose constraints on social vision' (Bacchi 1999: 29; Bacchi 2000). It also marks a distance from sociologists of social problems who are accused of studying pseudo-problems, that is social conditions for what they are unable to offer doable and realistic answers.

The second broad perspective in policy studies, rather than looking at policy as a response to existing conditions and problems, adopts an approach which frames policy 'as a discourse in which both problems and solutions are created' (Goodwin 1996: 67). This resonates with what was said earlier on the emergence of 'labelling theory' in the sociological study of deviance, and for policy analysts it implies a significant change in the objects of study that are no longer 'problems', but *problematizations*. To analyse the process of problematisation, borrowing Foucault's terms, means to investigate 'how and why certain things (behaviour, phenomena, processes) become a problem'; and how and why some social realities become 'the target of social regulation at a given time' (Foucault 2001:171). Genealogy is an approach that entails historicising claims to knowledge or, to use Dean's phrasing, 'the methodological problematisation of the given' (Dean 1992:216-217). Every policy proposal contains an explicit and/or implicit representation of the 'problem' it aims to address. A genealogical analysis takes as a starting point for policy analysis the consideration that the targets of policy and the 'problems' therein do not exist independently of the way they are represented either in political debates or in policy proposals. For Stone (1988: 106), 'problem definition is never simply a matter of defining goals and measuring our distance from them. It is rather the strategic representation of situations'. Therefore, identification and assessment of problem representations becomes a necessary part of policy analysis. The main purpose of such an approach is to 'create a space to consider *competing constructions of issues addressed in the policy process, and the ways in which these constructions leave other issues untouched*' (emphasis in the original, Bacchi 1999:4) and 'how policy decisions close off the space for normative debate because of the impression that indeed they are the best *solution* to a

problem' (idem: 20). To talk about something as a 'social problem'³⁷ has a whole range of implications, the most obvious of which is that a 'problem' is something 'out there', with a separate bounded existence; something politicians, social workers, or psychologists will 'fix'. Moreover, although labelling something 'social' implies an idea of public responsibility to address it, it also carries a tone of moral condemnation and a tendency to individualise causal agents, precluding a systemic explanation of the issue.

In sociology, the social constructivist perspective 'offers a way to define, understand, and study social problems that is decidedly distinct from previous [sociological] perspectives' (Schneider 1985: 209). The first systematic investigation of a 'social problem' as social construction dates back to 1977 when the publication of Spector and Kitsuse's seminal book *Constructing Social Problems (1977)* paved the way for the establishment of what became known as the sociology of social problems, a sociology that should account for 'the emergence and maintenance of claim-making and responding activities' (Kitsuse and Spector 1973: 415). The book was anticipated by a number of important articles published in the journal *Social Problems*, including 'Towards a sociology of social problems' (Kitsuse and Spector 1973) and 'Social problems as collective behaviour' (Blumer 1971). Kitsuse and Spector's article sketched out the key theoretical components of their approach, namely a theory of interests, a theory of moral indignation, and a theory of natural history, and it defines social problems as 'the activities of groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions' (idem: 415). Similarly, Blumer (1971: 298) defines social problems as 'products of a process of collective definition'. The affinity with the labelling perspective on deviance discussed at the beginning of the chapter is evident here: in particular, the two approaches share 'an interest in the process by which a phenomenon (an act or a condition) comes to be defined in a specific way' (idem: 416). There is also an affinity, with the sociology of social movements and social conflict (Best 1989).

³⁷ The use of inverted commas here and elsewhere in the text is meant to 'denaturalise the terms, to designate these signs as sites of political debate' (Butler 1992:19)

For Best (1989), Kitsuse and Spector's position that social problem analysts should avoid making assumptions about objective reality as 'the social constructionist never leaves language' (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993: 31) can be associated with 'strict constructivism' and is open to two important criticisms. First, an analysis free of assumptions about the objective conditions is impossible. Second, a move in this direction is detrimental as it limits the kinds of questions that can be asked and risks putting 'the analyst [...] into a contextless region where claims-making may only be examined in the abstract' (Best 1989: 143). A further criticism focused on the overemphasis on public claims-making in this literature which omits reflection on the impact of the contemporary organisation of power, knowledge, and discourse in precluding 'the conceptualisation and expression of some social problems claims' (Bacchi 1999: 59). This point will be developed further in the following section in which I discuss the complex issues connected with the making of subjectivities, the process of subjectification, and the question of the agency of the subject.

The subject as a social actor

Bureaucratic practices and the making of the subject

What sort of people were these? What were they talking about? What office did they belong to? K. was living in a free country, after all, everywhere was at peace, all laws were decent and were upheld, who was it who dared accost him in his own home? He was always inclined to take life as lightly as he could, to cross bridges when he came to them, pay no heed for the future, even when everything seemed under threat. (Kafka, *The Trial*)

I do not rule Russia; ten thousand clerks do. (Czar Nicholas I)

This section reviews the debate on processes and dynamics that contribute to the formation of subjectivities, in particular in the context of bureaucratic practices. The starting point of analysis is the work of Foucault on the process of subjectification through the concepts of 'docile bodies' and 'governmentality'. In Foucault's work (1977, 1979, 1980) the subjects are produced in and by power relations and they embody and experience the social relations of which they are products (Cederberg 2005). Poststructuralist scholars engaging with Foucault's ideas have pointed out

how in his earlier works on power and subjects, the main focus is on the role and impacts of institutions such as asylums (1961), hospitals (1963), and prisons (1977), and how power operates at the micro level producing as a result 'docile bodies' (Patton 1989; McNay 1992).

However, for Butler 'the Foucauldian subject is never fully constituted in subjection. It is repeatedly constituted in subjection, and it is in the possibility of a repetition that repeats against its origin that subjection might be understood to draw its inadvertently enabling power' (Butler 1997: 94). This reading of Foucault recalls Althusser's notion of *interpellation* (1984 [1971]; see also Weedon 2004) in which a subject is constituted by being hailed, addressed, and named. But the performative effort of naming can only attempt to bring its addressee into being since the interpellated subject's recognition of the name is equally important. Indeed, by conceptualising the self in relation to the discourses available to make sense of the world, 'individuals govern themselves into the places designed for them [...] in the complex web of power relations' (Cederberg 2005: 57). Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning, 'they constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern' (Weedon 1987: 108).

In Foucault's later work, from the first volume of *History of Sexuality* (1979) onward, his theorisation moves towards a more subject-oriented perspective, offering a framework for theorising the self which allows for the exercise of individual agency (Patton 1989; McNay 1992).

In order to investigate the process of subjectification and the space for individual agency, an exploration of the complexity of the links between the micro and the macro is essential. The links between the 'molecular' and the 'molar', Rose points out (Rose 1999: 6) take a variety of forms through which 'a delicate and complex web of affiliations between thousands of habits of which human beings are composed – movements, gestures, combinations, associations, passions, satisfactions, exhaustions, aspirations, contemplations – and the wealth, tranquillity, efficiency, economy, glory of the collective body' are established.

It is this art of combination that Foucault captured in the notion of governmentality (Foucault 1991). The term is the result of the semantic linking of governing (*gouverner*) and modes of thought (*mentalité*), and it encapsulates the idea that it is not possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the processes of subjectification underpinning them (Allen 1991; Lemke 2002; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). The concept of governmentality plays a decisive role in Foucault's analysis of power, and marks an important shift from his earlier approach to power in which he investigated subjectivity primarily with a view to 'docile bodies', in his words:

Governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself (Foucault 1993:204).

What is the role of the state in governing people? States are made of diverse and not always cohering human technologies of government. To borrow Painter's (1995: 34) definition,

States are constituted of spatialised social practices which are to a greater or lesser extent institutionalised (in a 'state apparatus') and which involve claims of authority which are general in social scope and which secure at least partial compliance through either consent, or coercion, or both.

Hence, the state, in a poststructuralist perspective, is not a monolithic actor, but rather diverse 'bundles of everyday institutions and forms of rule' (Corbridge et al. 2005: 5; Gupta 1995; Schwartzman 1993). These are the day-to-day practices of rule that structure and even produce settings for the conduct of business between the state and its citizens. The methodological implications of this approach will be discussed in chapter 3.

State officials play a crucial role in that they can make their categories and labels stick and impose their simplifications, 'because the state, of all institutions, is best equipped to insist on treating people according to its schemata' (Scott 1998: 82). However, this is a two way process, in fact, whilst bureaucrats are able 'to force others to create self-fulfilling prophecies', they also 'must deal with the

expectations the public entertains of the bureaucrats themselves' (Herzfeld 1992: 80). The operationalisation of these 'schemata', this thesis shows (cf. in particular Chapter 9), relies significantly on interpretations, activities, and attitudes of front-line, often lower-level, local government employees³⁸.

The normative value of cultural characterisations that takes place through the process of institutional labelling has attracted attention in different disciplines. In political sciences for example, Schneider and Ingram (1993) have invited policy scholars to consider the importance of the 'social construction of target populations' through cultural characterisations on issues such as agenda setting, legislative behaviour, and policy formulation, as well as citizen orientation and style of participation. As a result, categories that may have begun as the artificial inventions of migration officers, census takers, judges, or police officers can become categories that organise daily experiences and life chances of people precisely because they are embedded in state institutions (Kertzer and Arel 2002³⁹. In order for bureaucratic categories – 'the state's earlier fantasies' in Anderson's terms (1991: 169) – to become 'natural', time is a crucial variable. Through time and reiteration, policy shapes the way individuals construct themselves as subjects. 'Through policy', Shore and Wright argue, 'the individual is categorized and given such statuses and roles as 'subject', 'citizen', 'professional', 'national', 'criminal' and 'deviant'' (Shore and Wright, 1997: 4; see also Però 2007). Two more such categorisations, which are the focus of this thesis, are 'nomad' or 'refugee'.

One aspect associated with the process of labelling is particularly relevant to this thesis, namely the fact that institutional labels regulate the allocation, distribution and access to public resources (Schaffer 1984; Zetter 1985) which are getting scarcer in a time when the space of the public in Europe is disappearing (Schierup et

³⁸ Through an ethnography of state practices disaggregated at the village level in rural Uttar Pradesh, Akhil Gupta (1995) demonstrates in rich details how local workers, straddling the middle ground between the state and the individual villagers, submit, adapt and alter the meaning of governing population in their everyday acts of caring and counting.

³⁹ For Ruppert (2008), 'censuses are part of myriad identification practices that have come to produce subjects who are able to recognise and identify themselves in relation to the categories constructed and circulated by the census'.

al. 2006). The contraction of the welfare state is quickly advancing, denying substantial sections of the population access to social rights and protections (Sassen 2000; Schierup et al. 2006; Zetter et al. 2006)⁴⁰ and welfare rights are becoming more and more closely linked to notions of deservingness as measured by alleged social usefulness and participation in productivity. In this context, individuals and groups become compelled, within a set of social, cultural, political, and economic constraints, to adapt behaviour, and to redefine the way they present themselves in order to gain access (Schaffer and Lamb 1974).

In everyday life, civil servants are the gatekeepers that *mediate* the encounter between the individual and the state. It is in many ways up to them, on one hand, to operationalise policy categories and, on the other, to make them intelligible and meaningful to the claimants. But what is civil servants' degree of autonomy within the state apparatus? This is a question I will address in Chapter 9 in relation to the role of civil servants and, particularly, 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1980) in the management of the 'Gypsy problem', and here it should be noted that there seems to be no consensus in the literature on this issue and that the matter is highly debated in organisational studies and among those working on bureaucracy both pragmatically – regarding the implications for clients – and theoretically⁴¹. The tension between the agency of bureaucrats and the bureaucratic apparatus reflects the dualism between structure and agency which is widely discussed in social sciences. It reproduces the polarisation between a deterministic position which emphasises the role of social structure and a voluntarist perspective that privileges subjective agency (Knights 1997; Gleeson and Knights 2006). In Foucauldian terms, this tension is 'solved' through the introduction of the concept of 'governmentality' and the ubiquity of discourses through which the subjectivity of the bureaucrat is constructed (Newton 1998; Gleeson and Knights 2006; du Gay 1996). My research

⁴⁰ See Fargion (2005) for an analysis of the territorial politics of welfare in Italy and Schierup et al. 2006 for a critical analysis of welfare provisions for migrants in Italy.

⁴¹ In the field of anthropology there is a growing interest in the state and its workings, and ethnographic methodologies are gradually spreading their reach in this complex territory, in particular, but not exclusively, in post-colonial settings.

on street level bureaucrats and their interactions with Romani clients investigates how this tension is mediated and reflected in professional practices and aims to deconstruct – following Herzfeld’s suggestion – the fiction of the separation of person from action (Herzfeld 1992).

In general, the ways in which public sector employees think and perform their role are both indicative and reproductive of the relations of power governing the state and are inscribed in the boundaries, which can nevertheless be blurred or contested, of specific policy discourses (see Gupta 1995). The discursive construction of bureaucrats therefore happens contextually to the process of subjectivation of clients and the two are recursively linked – Hacking (2004) calls this the ‘looping effect’.

The civil servant is discursively constructed in relation to, and by, the state. However the latter is not a homogeneous entity, arguably not even an entity *per se*. The discursive terrain appears therefore contested and fragmented, coalesced around different sources of power, influence, and interests which are historically contingent and operate at micro as well as macro levels.

The emphasis on the historicity of power relations and subjects invites us to frame the discussion within more historically-specific and geographically-specific parameters which need to be investigated and analysed in detail. So, for example, neoliberalism can be viewed as a capitalist machinery and an overarching societal discourse that is (re)structuring a new planet power and physical geography⁴², thereby affecting also states and their bureaucracies. However, while speaking of a ‘neoliberal civil servant’ is just an abstraction as it selects and chooses one among the several discourses simultaneously working on and through the individual, the label has some heuristic value as it helps to highlight an important aspect of the experience of being civil servant nowadays: the struggle to negotiate in everyday

⁴² Ong warns against the risk of approaching neoliberalism as an ensemble of fixed attributes that ‘will everywhere produce the same political results and social transformations and suggests to adopt a lateral approach based on the conceptualisation of neoliberalism as a ‘logic of governing that migrates and is selectively taken up in diverse political contexts’ (Ong 2007: 3)

working practice the apparently irreducible conflict between, on one side, an overarching political discourse that puts under attack 'traditional' functions of the state, and explicitly defines the state machinery, of which bureaucracy is the pillar, as inherently negative, ineffective and inefficient, and, on the other side, the actual interpellations of claimants on the ground, in a situation characterised by limited resources and short term funding (coherently with the neoliberal discourse) (du Gay 1996; Castel 2004; Gleeson and Knights 2006; Ong 2007). A corollary to this is the emergence and expansion of the role of quasi-state institutions and agencies to which functions partially or totally removed from the state are subcontracted (Sassen 1996; 2000; Ong 1999). This has also an impact on policy making as policy is no longer formulated primarily by governments, but additionally by a plethora of supra/inter/intra national entities (Wedel et al. 2005).

Exploring how civil servants cope with the dilemma of having to make sense of the distance between the two extremes in relation to the current management of the 'Gypsy problem' in Italy is one the aims of this work and, as I argue in the next chapter, this requires an in-depth investigation which links an analysis of the everyday interactions between Roma and Ashkali migrants and a diverse range of non-Roma, including civil servants, social workers, third sector workers, priests and nuns, and political activists.

The agency of the social actor

Power is a productive process, creating human subjects and their capacity to act (Butler 1990: 139).

Making up people changes the space of possibilities for personhood (Hacking 2002: 107)

This section discusses the agency of social actors and their space for action by bringing together two bodies of work, namely Foucault's conceptualisation of subject and discourse, and Goffman's sociological exploration of everyday social interactions. To encourage this attempt is an essay by Hacking (2004) entitled 'Between Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman: between discourse in abstract and face-to-face interaction', in which Hacking argues that Goffman's attention to

everyday interactions can complement Foucault's work, suggesting ways to understand 'how the forms of discourse become part of the lives of ordinary people, or even how they become institutionalised and made part of the structure of institutions at work' (idem: 278).

Foucault, but even more Foucauldians, have been criticised for their theorisation of subjectivity and human agency that, critics argue (see Newton 1998; Thompson and Ackroyd 1995; McNay 2003; Armstrong 2002), is constrained by the overarching determination of discourse. In particular, Foucault's approach is criticised for its alleged failure to offer, despite its claim, a solution to the long debated dualism between structure and agency⁴³. There have been several responses to this critique. A point seems shared among a number of scholars: the dualism between subjects and structures is misplaced, since the subject himself is not some independent, bounded, and fixed unity, nor a pre-given unitary and sovereign individual (Weedon 1987): instead, it is intimately bound to power/knowledge relations that are embedded in both subjects and social structures (Butler 2005). This stance is not merely 'anti-dualistic' in the sense spelled out by Anthony Giddens in *The constitution of society*⁴⁴ (1984), but 'post-dualistic' since the aim is not 'simply to replace one set of deterministic orderings with another' but rather their complete eradication (Knights 1997: 16)⁴⁵. For Rose (1996), no general theory of the individual is needed and the question of agency is a false problem since the capacity for action comes out of 'the specific regimes and technologies that machinate humans in diverse ways' (Rose 1996: 187). Adopting the perspective of governmentality, the polarity of subjectivity and power ceases to be plausible: 'government refers to a

⁴³ McNay points out that often Foucauldians have privileged a negative understanding of the process of subject formation with subjectification coinciding with subjection. As a consequence, she argues, agency is mainly confined to the limited spaces of 'resistance to, or dislocation of, dominant norms' (2003: 140)

⁴⁴ Giddens' theory of structuration attempt to find a balance between agency and structure by suggesting that social structures make social action possible, and at the same time that social action creates those very structures (*duality of structure*). The theory employs a recursive notion of actions constrained and enabled by structures which are produced and reproduced by that action.

⁴⁵ For alternative 'solutions' to the dualism of structure and agency, see Bourdieu's theory of practice and in particular the concept of *habitus* (1977) through which external structures are internalised into the habitus while the actions of the agent externalise interactions between actors into the social relationships in the field and Archer's morphogenetic approach developed within the critical realist tradition (1995).

continuum, which extends from political government right through to forms of self-regulation, namely technologies of the self' (Lemke 2002: 12)⁴⁶.

Butler's reflection adds a further dimension that is particularly relevant for my search for spaces of possibility for action of a socially marginalised and racially discriminated minority. She writes,

Called by an injurious name, I come into social being and because I have certain inevitable attachment to my existence, [...] I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially (Butler 1997: 104).

Butler's words capture two paradoxes embedded in the process of subjectification, namely 'the self-colonising trajectory of certain forms of identity politics' (idem: 104-5), an idea that recalls Althusser's concept of interpellation (1984[1971]) which is effective as long as, and in so far as, the individual responds to it; and the recognition that any space of contestation and resistance requires the subject occupying – and being occupied by – the 'injurious name' that in the first place constituted her. In other words, the acknowledgement of the terms of subjection becomes a necessary step for the success of any attempt to resignify the subject.

Butler's argument relies upon her notion of performativity that she describes as 'that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' (Butler 1993: 2). The point is to mediate between the idea that subjects, but also gender, race, identity, etc, are socially constructed and the concern about the politically disabling consequences of theories of social determination. Her aim is therefore both to recognize that the subject is socially constructed and, at the same time, to argue that this does not mean the erasure of agency. The notion of performativity seeks to open up a space for agency. A performative act is one which brings into being or enacts that which it names, and so marks the constitutive or productive power of discourse. Performativity is the 'vehicle through which ontological effects are established [...], the discursive mode by which ontological

⁴⁶ This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of neoliberal forms of governance where the direct intervention of state apparatus is only one of the forms of control over individuals. By rendering individual subjects 'responsible', neoliberal rationality produces a shift of responsibility for social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty from the society to the individual (Lemke 2002).

effects are installed' (Butler interviewed by Osborne and Segal 1994). At the same time, while they are constituted through discourse, this constitution is 'an activity not an act; the subject is not a final product but an ongoing, always incomplete series of effects of a process of reiteration' (Weeks 1996: 94).

Performativity implies a kind of compulsory reiteration of those norms through which a subject is constituted: 'The 'performative' dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms' (Butler 1993: 94). Agency is then located in the possibility for variation on that reiteration through resignification (*contra* McNay 2003; Nussbaum 1999). In more recent work, Butler develops the ethical implication of this argument, noting that 'a theory of subject formation that acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge can serve a conception of ethics and, indeed, responsibility' (Butler 2005: 19).

Another important contribution to this debate has come from Stuart Hall (1996). Hall engages with Foucault's radical historicisation of the category of the subject offering an articulated interpretation of Foucault's theoretical reflection on human agency. Hall detects that Foucault himself was aware of some of the limitations of his work on the matter and demonstrates how this awareness can be detected in the shift from the archaeological method, which neglects to analyse the interactions between individuals and discursive subject positions, to the genealogical one, which emphasises the central role of power in the account of discourse and opens up the double-sided character of subjectification/subjectation. However, in the genealogical work, the normative power of discourse on individuals is still overwhelming. In his later volumes of *The history of sexuality*, Foucault, Hall argues, tacitly recognises that 'it is not enough for the law to summon, discipline, produce and regulate, but there must also be the corresponding production of a response [...] from the side of the subject' (Hall 1996: 12).

Placing the subject, placing power

Before turning my attention to the discussion of the spatial dimension of power and social interactions and to explore the situatedness of the constitution of the subject, a clarification of my understanding and use of the concept of 'identity' is needed.

Questioning identity

The heuristic and analytic value of the term 'identity' is undergoing major scrutiny. The concept of identity is thought to be ambiguous and fraught with unresolved problems (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). However, despite being put 'under erasure', 'there is nothing to do but continue to think with it' (Hall 1996: 1). The persisting relevance of the concept is manifest in the domain of politics where the signifier 'identity' plays a central role in modern political movements and forms of mobilisation (i.e. identity politics) (cf. Barth 1969; Eriksen 1993; Brubaker 2002; Vermeersch 2006). It is also relevant in relation to the question of agency that, as discussed earlier, has undergone important rethinking following Foucault's theory of discursive practice.

Foucault's work invites a reconceptualisation of the displaced and decentralised 'subject', and a rearticulation of the relationship between subjects and discursive practices. The concept of identity making, or identification, can be employed to capture the dual nature of this process, that, on the one hand, 'interpellates' social actors by designating and marking the situated and immanent point of *suture* between discourses, policies, and practices, and, on the other, acknowledges the agency of social actor in producing and shaping their understanding and position in the social world. In this way, it combines the intimate world of the subject with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations (Holland et al. 1998). The use of terms such as 'identity making' or 'identification' stresses the processual, anti-essentialist nature of the phenomenon. Hall defines identification as a 'strategic and positional' process which happens within, not outside, discourse and is produced in 'specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies' (Hall 1996: 4).

For Anthias (1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2002), 'identity' plays a central role as a category of practice, as a 'socially meaningful concept'. However, she argues that as a category of analysis it operates 'as a disabling concept that limits the focus and moves the analyst away from context, meaning and practice' (Anthias 2002: 493) and fails to deliver 'an understanding of the contradictory, located and positional aspects of constructions of belonging and otherness (idem: 511). Identity making is

a continuous process of construction and redefinition of the self from resources and imaginaries belonging to different and intersecting social and cultural realms, located in the space 'at the intersection of structure (as social position/social effects) and agency (as social positioning/meaning and practice)' (Anthias 2002: 502). As a consequence, any articulation of identity is ontologically only momentarily complete. When displayed in the public arena, political subjects 'are articulated through moments of closure that create subjects as surfaces of inscription [...] invariably incomplete' (Keith and Pile 1993: 27).

Some methodological implications of this approach to 'identity' will be discussed in the following chapter. Here I want to draw attention to the never-ending process of subject construction, which recalls the concept of performativity detailed by Butler (see above), and to the inextricable link between the questions 'who I am' and 'where I am (from)'. Identities are, therefore, a mobile, often unstable relation of difference premised on various forms of exclusion and construction of otherness and situated in specific settings whose boundaries are themselves open to continuous redefinition (Keith and Pile 1993). The next section reflects upon the spatiality of social interactions and emphasises how the construction of subjectivities is ontologically embedded into specific space-times.

The spatial dimension of social interactions

The social and the spatial are inseparable (Massey 1994: 254)

In the words of Foucault (1984: 252), 'space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power'. Power/knowledge and space reveal an intimate connection, a 'crucial nexus' (Soja 1989), whereas structures of meaning which are implicated in the production and use of power are themselves implicated and produced in specific places. There are in particular two components of Foucault's conceptualisation that informed my understanding of 'nomad camps'. The first contends that social relations are necessarily spatial as individuals do not live in a void, but are inserted into a set of social relations that delineates sites which are neither reducible to, nor superimposable on, one

another; the second argues that power operates spatially, or through the management of spaces.

The first component can be related to the previous discussion about the workings of a complex state apparatus. When examining the role of bureaucrats, civil servants, and other quasi-state actors in operationalising and implementing institutional labels through policy, protocols, procedures, and practice, I have stressed the everyday dimension of these operations. Here, a further element can be added: these operations are, as the encounters between civil servants and citizens, spatially situated. The spatiality of human encounters and social relations needs to be acknowledged because paying close attention to how and *where* these encounters are performed can provide a more nuanced understanding of how people experience and inhabit the state, and how state policy and institutional labels construct them as specific situated subjects. In my case, respectively, how do Roma and Ashkali refugees see and understand the state? How must the socially constructed and policy constructed 'nomad' be here and now?

But there is also another level of analysis within my discussion of the 'Gypsy problem' in Italy, namely the issue of the placing of subjects into specific and dedicated spaces and the relationship of this 'placement' with both the process of subjectification and that of problematisation. Indeed, adopting the view that space is socially constituted and constitutive of the social has important implications relevant to the process of subjectification, because it acknowledges and reveals the significance of spatiality for creating and sustaining a sense of self (Pile and Thrift 1995)⁴⁷. The key question I shall address in relation to my topic is: how, and to what extent, the experience of the nomad camp is incorporated by and embodied in the residents, how it is reflected in their subjectivity and, to borrow Harvey's expression (2000), how it shapes their 'spaces of hope'?

⁴⁷ Another interesting cross-fertilisation comes from the adoption/adaptation of Butler's concepts of performance and performativity for understanding spaces as 'brought into being through performances and as a performative articulation of power' (Gregson and Rose 2000: 434).

As for the second element, it is now widely accepted that space 'is never empty: it always embodies a meaning' (Lefebvre [1974] 1991: 154); it is not the 'innocent' and 'depoliticised' context of social interactions (Lefebvre 1974; Soja 1989), rather it is produced through them and plays a key role in producing, and reproducing, power and identity. Architecture is an example of the use of space in power relations, although, Foucault argues (1980: 149) there is much more than this as 'a whole history remains to be written of spaces [...] from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat, institutional architecture from classroom to the design of hospitals', passing via detention centres for undocumented migrants, refugee camps, asylum identification centres, and nomad camps. Hence, the management of space can be classified as a particular technology of power which creates spaces that are at once architectural, functional, and hierarchical.

Space, following Massey (1984, 1994), is relational and dynamic, continuously produced through the interactions of social relations and places. A 'place', she argues, can be defined as 'social relations stretched over space', constituted by 'the combination of their succession of roles within a series of wider, national and international, spatial division of labour' (Massey 1994: 14). Consequently, a specific place can be understood in terms of its particular and dynamic position within a web of social relations that reaches far beyond its geographical contours (Bondi 2005). This resonates with Gupta and Ferguson's warning (1997; see Ferguson 1997; Fog Olwig and Hastrup 1997) that too often research has taken 'the local' and 'local culture' as granted and natural, leaving aside social and political processes of place making, 'conceived as embodied practices that shape identities and enable resistances' (idem: 6). This argument will be developed in the next chapters when I shall discuss the making, maintenance, and role of refugee camps and other asylum institutions vis-à-vis their residents, other inmates, and the broader society and address the questions of why Roma refugees end up living in 'nomad camps', and if there can be a 'nomad' outside these camps?

A final point can be made in relation to the spaces of exclusion and how the management of space – a technology by which social systems produce and reproduce power relations – plays an important role in the process of othering that,

as discussed earlier, coexists with and is inextricably linked with the process of identity making. A particular form of space management is represented by the creation of places such as prisons, clinics, hospitals, and camps where specific individuals or group of individuals are confined. The spatial separation becomes a symbolic boundary which separates those inside from the others around and along this *limen*. People – both the insiders and the outsiders – define and negotiate their identities. However, as the previous discussion has shown, these identities are in flux and can hardly be captured by a simple definition, as people are simultaneously subjected to several discourses whose relative ‘weight’ varies in relation to power relations and circumstances.

Conclusion

People make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing (Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte)

In this chapter I have developed the conceptual framework of the thesis within what can broadly be called a social constructivist epistemology. Rather than confining the discussion within a specific disciplinary tradition, I have sought to build up a framework of analysis which borrows concepts and theories developed in different disciplines and areas of research around the link between institutional labelling, policy making (and implementation), and the coping strategies of subjects. However, I am particularly indebted to the work of Foucault and to his ideas and conceptualisation on power, discourse, space, and subjectivity.

The adoption of a social constructivist epistemology, which proposes that our understanding of reality is socially constructed, is important for my argument because it points to the historical and cultural specificity of what constitutes a ‘problem’. It suggests that policy and social ‘problems’ are defined through a process of selection and construction which is dependent on power relations. Moreover, it encourages an understanding of the policy process as a process of argumentation (Fischer and Forester 1993), whereas ‘successful’ policy making depends on the ability to construct shared or accepted understanding of the ‘real’

and demands exploration of how language is employed both to advance and to legitimise selective accounts of the nature of the world (Hastings 1998:194).

The discussion started with some questions posed by the philosopher Ian Hacking regarding the impact of forms of categorisation on personhood. However, my focus has been limited to a specific type of categorisation: those promoted, used, and implemented by the state in its various geographical, sectorial, and hierarchical articulations in order to govern people. This thesis will explore the complexity of the relationship between labelling and policy and the role they both play in the building of bureaucratic identities through which the political system, in its various articulations, manages and categorises 'the other'. Also, importantly, it will explore how individuals manage to adapt, adjust, and contest these processes.

In the first part of the chapter, I discussed the relation between labelling, power, and discourse; the institutionalisation of labels through policy and their operationalisation by bureaucrats and quasi-state actors; and the role of labelling as a key component in the construction of 'social problems'. As instruments of political discourse, labels embody internal dialectics, negotiations, power relations, and conflicts existing inside the state apparatus and between institutional and non-institutional actors. The state is not a homogenous entity and it can speak with many voices (and many labels). These labels can be in conflict and can consequently produce conflicting outcomes, both conceptually and politically. Semantic conflicts can be dramatically real in their effects and impact on policy making and implementation, as well as on people's attitude towards the group of individuals objectified by such institutional definitions. Policy needs to be understood in the wider social context in which it is formulated, and as a place of political struggle and composition. It is made at many levels in society through legislation, social and political structures, institutional and institutionalised practices and discourses and through the situated struggles/encounters which take place in legislative chambers, local authority offices, nomad camps, meetings of various kinds and the media.

In the second part of the chapter, the argument was centred on subjects/social actors and their room of manoeuvring *vis-à-vis* state officials, bureaucrats and their normative practices, as well as the room to manoeuvre of civil servants and street

bureaucrats within the state apparatus. Institutional labels are not merely descriptive. State categories are prescriptive and are embedded in the discursive construction of collective identities that constitute the basis for possible social action to take place. 'The categories used by state agents' – Scott convincingly argues – 'are not merely means to make their environment legible; they are the authoritative tune to which most of the population must dance' (Scott 1998:83). Bureaucratic labels eventually create the subject of their action and define, in a process that is never closed and always instable, the political and geographical space within which the subject can live, operate and mobilise. In order to expand the theoretical understanding of the subject matter, I have discussed the process of subjectification and clarified my use of terms such as 'identity making' and 'identifications' to indicate the processual nature of the formation of subjectivities. Finally, I have concluded with some reflection on the situatedness of the processes described above and the spatiality of social interactions. The spatial situatedness of social interactions and the production of social spaces through policy are important aspects of my analysis and will be developed in the following chapters, in particular in the discussion of the location of the 'Gypsy problem' in Italy.

CHAPTER THREE. AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE 'GYPSY PROBLEM'

Introduction

To analyze the process of problematisation, Foucault postulates (2001: 171), means to investigate 'how and why certain things (behaviour, phenomena, processes) become a *problem*', and how and why they become 'the target of social regulation at a given time'. I have referred to this quote in the previous chapter and it returns here within a different context. It helps to set the tone of this discussion on the methodology of my research. My task is to deconstruct the problematisation of 'Gypsies' in Italy by examining the 'assumptions and postulates' of the 'production of truths' (Derrida 1967). This will in turn lead to an awareness of 'the historical contingency and inventedness of our taken-for-granted present' (Shore and Wright 1997: 17) and the normative cognitive structures and interpretative schemata that shape our understanding of reality (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou 1998).

To begin with, it is important to recall a point made in the previous chapter, that the definition of certain things or individuals as a 'problem' is neither univocal nor unquestionable. It is a discursive terrain open to strategic representation and contestation over meanings, involving a constellation of social actors with different political agendas, each holding different powers of negotiation. Hence, it is important to examine the position of social actors in their claim for truth, and this includes the researcher, who is himself/herself a social actor (see Bourdieu 1977; Smith 1999; Haraway 1991).

As research methods should follow the framing of questions and respond to specific research purposes (Cederberg 2005), it may be useful therefore to briefly recap the key questions I am trying to address in this thesis, as a guide to the following discussion. I am setting out to explore the extent to which the Romani communities are dealt with as a problem in Italy; how the conceptions and agendas of policy makers, civil servants, and front line bureaucrats' impact on policy and practice with regard to these communities; how Kosovo Roma and Ashkali refugees are constructed as a part of the broader 'Gypsy problem' and the implications of this problematisation on their life chances and coping strategies; the interplay between

different forms and level of governance; and the role of nomad camps in the governance of the 'Gypsy problem' and in the experience of residents.

Over the years, my answers to these questions have varied and with them the research methods I have adopted. There is neither a *right* nor a *single* method of addressing such a broad and complex set of questions. Each method has offered a different vantage point and has helped to illuminate one or several of the many angles of my *problematique*. Writing this chapter serves as a way of rationalising the work I have been doing during a relatively long, though not continuous, period of fieldwork. It will force what has been a circular, reiterative, and sometimes disordered process of experimenting, researching, reflecting, and questioning, into a linear and clear narrative. However, as a result, some of the complexity, chaos, and unpredictability inherent to the research process will inevitably be sidelined. The following words by Appadurai (1988: 16) capture this process:

The ethnographic text is the more or less creative imposition of order on the many conversations that lie at the heart of fieldwork.

This chapter is developed around four interconnected themes: the definitional and operational problems associated with doing an ethnography of the management of the 'Gypsy problem'; matters of locations, scale, and scope of the research project; methodological and ethical concerns in doing research on refugees and the role of the researcher; and finally issues of access to interviewees and restitution. However, before engaging with these themes, a brief epistemological prologue will expand on some points touched upon in the previous chapter and provide key elements for framing the overall methodological discussion.

Epistemological standpoint

The adoption of a social constructivist epistemology⁴⁸, which proposes that our understanding of reality is socially created, is suitable to my work because it points

⁴⁸ In the seminal work *The Social Construction of Reality* Berger and Luckmann (1966) claim that 'what remains sociologically essential is the recognition that all symbolic universes and all legitimations are human products; their existence has its base in the lives of concrete individuals, and has no empirical status apart from these

to the historical and cultural specificity of what constitutes a 'problem'. It suggests that policy and social 'problems' are defined through a process of selection and construction that is dependent on societal dynamics and processes, which are time and space-specific. Moreover, it encourages an understanding of the policy process as a process of *argumentation* (Fischer and Forester 1993), which demands exploration of how language is employed both to advance and to legitimise selective accounts of the nature of the social world (Hastings 1998:194).

However, I am also aware of the limits of 'strict' or 'radical' constructivism (see Best 1989; Fox 1998) and the risk of relativisms entailed, which can be 'a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally' (Haraway 1991: 191). This issue is central to the work of the feminist theorist Donna Haraway, whose quest for feminist objectivity is characterized by a partial move from a radical deconstructivist approach to scientific truth claims (Haraway 1976, 1989). The problem is, she argues,

how to have *simultaneously* an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, *and* a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world (Haraway 1991: 187).

For Haraway, the answer lies in a doctrine of embodied objectivity, whereby omniscient scientists do not escape representation, and formerly conquered objects ('marked subjects') may be appreciated for their situated knowledges and partial perspectives. However, Haraway cautions against romanticizing the vision of the 'subjugated', whose positionings are deemed by some theorists to be 'innocent' and therefore trustworthy. On the contrary, she argues, 'they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretative core of all knowledge' (Haraway 1991: 191).

This perspective draws upon Foucault's idea of power/knowledge discussed earlier. The problem – 'the essential political problem for the intellectual' – Foucault

lives' (1966: 128). For a critical reflection upon the politics of social research and the defence of value-neutrality of a post-positivist social science see Hammersley (1998).

argues, 'is not changing people's consciousness [...] but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth' (Foucault 1980: 133).

For Walby (2000: 19), an approach to knowledge such as Haraway's overestimates the significance of social location by reifying the boundaries between social groupings that are instead permeable, as 'communities overlap' and 'have relations with each other in a global context'. This critique takes us to what is a key epistemological question that needs to be addressed: what are the criteria by which knowledge claims can be assessed? If knowledge is merely relative to power, and knowledge claims are always partial and situated, are these claims therefore incommensurable?

To answer this question, it may be useful to turn to Foucault's concept of *episteme*. Episteme can be defined as a historical *a priori* which grounds knowledge, a social construction in itself which pre-exists a specific setting, that grounds knowledge and its discourses, and thus represents the condition of their possibility within a particular epoch. Episteme, he argues, is 'the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within [...] a field of scientificity, and that will be acceptable to say are true or false' (Foucault 1980: 197).

Another interesting way out of this epistemological dilemma is offered by the concept of 'epistemic reflexivity' developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1994). For Bourdieu, epistemic reflexivity is a means of underwriting rather than undermining scientific knowledge which would otherwise be merely another strategic attempt to maximize symbolic capital in the struggles of the intellectual field. There is an aspect of Bourdieu's 'signature obsession' with the epistemological potential of reflexivity that makes it close to my research ethos, its being 'quintessentially embedded in, and turned toward, scientific practice' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 46) and political action (Bourdieu 2003). I shall come back to this more in detail later when addressing the issues of researcher positionality and issues of restitution.

I will now turn my attention toward the more methodological aspects of my research.

Doing an ethnography of a policy community

Rethinking the 'field': studying down, studying up, studying through

What does it mean to apply an ethnographic approach to the study of policies? To what extent can policies be an anthropological and sociological concern? Shore and Wright offer an insightful entry point into these questions:

Policies are codifications of norms and values; charters for action; blueprints for a future society and guides to conduct and practice [...]. At the same time policies connect ideals and institutions with the individuals and communities who may be objects of policy, or the instruments through which it is made effective (Shore and Wright 1996: 476).

While this quote clarifies the extent to which policies are relevant to my research, a major methodological problem needs to be addressed concerning the 'field' of the research and in particular the definition of 'the scope which can satisfactorily account for the role of the multiple institutions and actors which, while operating on different levels, all influence the policy process' (Habernicht Larsen 1998: 14). The discussion around the boundaries of the 'field' is a central debate in anthropology. 'The field is a (arguably *the*) central component of the anthropological tradition, to be sure; but anthropology also teaches that traditions are always reworked and even reinvented as needed' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b: 4). The point hence is not abandoning fieldwork, rather decentring and reconfiguring 'the field' as 'the field of relations which are of significance to the people involved in the study' (Hastrup and Fog Olwig 1997: 8) and as 'one element in a multistranded methodology' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b: 37) for the construction of situated knowledges (Haraway 1988, 1989).

Traditional anthropological studies of policy-making have adopted a 'studying down' approach that tends to focus on the impact of policy in particular local contexts. In these studies, the role of the anthropologist was mainly to explain, by virtue of her local knowledge, the discrepancies between expected policy outcomes and target population reactions. The 'field' in these studies was frequently treated as given, an objective framework within which the anthropologist could carry out her investigations and from which she could extract information. The unit of

analysis became 'a people' dislocated from the wider historical, social, and political context.

To counterbalance this research approach, in the late 1960s and early 1970s a 'studying up' perspective was championed by scholars more sensitive to the role of asymmetric power relations embedded in the policy process (Heyman 1995; Hyndman 2000). As a result, the 'field' of investigation shifted from the local context to the policy-making context and the power relations therein. However, this approach, as the following quote remarks, leaves aside the important question of how different agendas and actors are articulated and negotiated in the course of everyday interactions:

All forms of external intervention necessarily enter the existing life-words of the individual and social groups affected, and in this way are mediated and transformed by these same actors and structures. Also to the extent that large-scale and 'remote' social forces do alter the life chances and behaviour of individuals, they can only do so through shaping, directly or indirectly, the everyday life experiences and perceptions of the individuals concerned (Long cited in Habernicht Larsen 1998:21).

To address the kind of questions listed in the introduction of the chapter a different definition of 'field' is needed which, while recognising the interconnections between policy-making at different levels and localities, is also attentive to the fact that there is no simple and unilateral correlation between the two (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a; Appadurai 1988; Mountz 2003). Moreover, the very idea of a locality needs to be problematised turning towards a focus on social and political processes of place making. Shore and Wright propose to adopt a four tier strategy which examines respectively,

the epistemological and conceptual base upon which policy is formulated, [...] the discourses and institutions through which it is articulated, [...] its social impact and, more importantly, its meaning for those individuals and communities that are at its receiving end.

The aim of such a strategy would be to reveal,

how differently situated discourses are constructed and contested, whose interpretations of reality prevails, and how certain parties are able to mobilise

institutional power to make their definitions of the situation authoritative (Shore and Wright 1996: 476-77).

This approach is what Reinhold calls (Reinhold [1993] in Shore and Wright 1996) 'studying through' and involves following the flow of events that move between various local and national arenas and interconnect different debates and conflicts in the formation of a new policy.

To pursue such a demanding and multifaceted research programme requires a range of research methods and a multi-site ethnography which goes beyond the traditional anthropological focus on a geographically bounded place or ethnic group to include a systematic investigation of such factors as the working of the broader policy-making context, policy documents, and public statements of intention and vision by the various actors involved, media coverage and, importantly, an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences and understandings of the various members of the policy community – including, of course, the target group – defined by, and defining, the 'Gypsy problem'. The expression 'policy community' tries to capture the 'specific constellations of actors, activities, and influences that shape policy decisions and their implementation, effects, and how they play out' (Wedel et al. 2005: 39) and are created by and through the policy process. This community is an accidental and transient community of memory and practice whose members belong by virtue of their roles and positions in the 'Gypsy problem'. Practice here has a double meaning emphasising, on one side, the craftsmanship of the policymaking process and, on the other, the contribution that those involved in the implementation of policy, through the knowledge and authority they gain from their positionality, bring to the policy process (see Malkki 1997a; Kelly 2003; Whyte 2003; Sigona 2005a).

The laws and policies that shape the 'Gypsy' regime are themselves complex, at times contradictory, operating differently in shifting contexts. The social spaces in which they are created are fundamentally different from those in which they are meant to be enacted, though this of course does not mean that they are only relevant in the spaces at which they are targeted. As the discussion in Part 3 and 4 of the thesis will highlight, the point is rather that practices within nomad camps, as

well as practices producing nomad camps, cannot be understood without reference to other spaces and vice versa. Nomad camps have to be situated in the political geographies of the territory in which they are located.

Fieldwork encounters: methods for an ethnography of a 'policy community'

What people think about their situation, and what they tell you about their experiences, is a result of various processes, of different personal histories, personalities, opinions, positions, and expectations that all intersect' (Cederberg 2005: 81)

In this section, I shall discuss how I carried out my ethnography which combined participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and analysis of written documents and public statements. During the fieldwork, these three elements fed each other in an iterative and reflexive process which contributed to my overall understanding and theorisation of the 'Gypsy problem' (see Schimidt 2000).

A central element of my methodology is the analysis of policy documents which proved a valuable source of ethnographic data. Policy and policy-related documents are read as 'cultural texts' that 'can be treated as classificatory devices, as narratives that serve to justify or condemn the present, or as rhetorical devices and discursive formations that function to empower some and silence others' (Shore and Wright 1997: 15). These documents, a corpus including national, regional, and local norms and policy statements, regional assembly debates and politicians' public statements referring to the 'Gypsies', are analysed looking in particular at the role of labels and frames in constructing the dominant discourse on 'Gypsies'. In accordance with a constructivist standpoint, this is considered as a category of practice and not taken as given (Brubaker 1996); rather the analysis will explore the process by which it is constructed, articulated, contested, and reified throughout the policy process and implementation (Zetter 1991; Sigona 2003).

The importance of power relations in the study of language use is a central argument in Bourdieu's trenchant critique of traditional linguistic approaches. Bourdieu convincingly argues that 'an adequate analysis of political discourse must be based on a systematic reconstruction of the field within which such discourse is

produced and received (with its distinctive organizations, schemes of production and perception, etc) and its relation to the broader social space' (Bourdieu 1991: 29).

Following Bourdieu's suggestion, in the next chapter I shall develop the analysis of discourse and discursive practices in parallel with the analysis of Italian policy and practice of management of the 'Gypsy problem' at the national, regional, and local levels showing the overlap, interplay, and conflicts between these only apparently separated dimensions. An important result of this dual focus will be the definition of the key actors of the 'Gypsy problem', whose interpretations and experiences will be explored through participant observation and in-depth qualitative interviews. However, as the focus of the work is the reception and settlement of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali refugees in Italy, it will be also necessary to analyse labelling, policy, and practice on 'refugees' in the Italian context and in particular in my research locations, in order to identify possible explanations to the cooptation of Roma and Ashkali refugees in the 'Gypsy problem' and its consequences.

Doing an ethnography of a policy community was not an easy task and, as I shall discuss later in relation to the location of the 'field' and my positionality as a researcher, it required quite a lot of mediations and adjustments, in particular with regard to the issue of access to the various and different actors involved.

Given the variety of subjects involved, it was necessary to adopt different interview techniques and to use a topic guide for interviews that was flexible and open enough to enable me to engage interviewees on the meanings and understandings of their role and behaviour.

For Anthias (2002: 511), interview narratives 'are produced in relation to socially available and hegemonic discourses and practices' but also in relation to the immediate and broader contexts, and their understanding and interpretation, to which they are a dialectic response. Interview data have multiple footings. They are 'saturated by images of the social dynamics of the interview itself, projections of the social context in which it takes place, the roles and power dynamics of interviewer and respondent, and their respective agendas, ... [and by] the imagined texts that will be created through the use of interview data' (Briggs 2003:246). It is crucial to

bear in mind these elements in order to avoid what Bourdieu termed 'the biographical illusion' (Bourdieu 1994) in relation to much life history-based research. There can be a tendency in much interview-based research to 'naturalise' interview data as a 'stable set of *social facts* that have an objective existence independent of the linguistic and contextual settings in which they are *expressed*' (Briggs 2003: 247). It should be remembered that the interview is a situated encounter and a performance in which 'the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent' (Schwandt 1997: 79; see also Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Denzin and Lincoln 2003)⁴⁹.

Doing Interviews

During fieldwork I conducted fifty formal in-depth interviews, had several informal meetings and conversations and attended, dinners and social gatherings, mainly but not exclusively, in my two main locations - Florence and Venice. As the 'field' of the 'Gypsy problem' goes beyond the local level, I also include interviews and discussions at regional and national government offices and national NGOs in order to capture the multidimensionality of my topic.

The interviews were conducted mainly in Italian, with Roma and Ashkali interviewees, most of whom had been living in Italy for five years or more. On a few occasions, I had the assistance of a Romani speaker as interpreter. This was sometimes a member of the family of the interviewee. However, the difficulties associated with dealing with a double layer of interpretations, the issue of the interpreter's positionality in the interview setting, and the practicalities of having to find someone to volunteer for the job, persuaded me to limit the use of interpreters (see Temple and Edwards 2002).

⁴⁹ More in general this reflects Bourdieu's point (1991: 2) that everyday linguistic exchanges are 'situated encounters between agents endowed with socially structured resources and competencies, in such a way that every linguistic interaction, however personal and insignificant it may seem, bears the traces of the social structure that it both expresses and help to reproduce'

The interviewees are Roma and Ashkali refugees and activists, NGO and faith group workers, local politicians and city councillors, and local authority personnel – both front-line social workers and high-level bureaucrats. However, as the focus of my research is not only to map the working and multiple dimensions of the ‘Gypsy problem’ but also to explore coping strategies and settlement patterns of Roma and Ashkali refugees in Italy, the interviews with Roma and Ashkali refugees, both individual and group-based, are more numerous.

In my sample of refugees, I tried to ensure that there was a balance both in terms of gender and in age. I also attempted to find respondents both living in ‘nomad camps’ and those not, although this sometimes proved challenging, for reasons and with consequences I shall explore later. My interest in the lived experiences of Roma and Ashkali refugees also motivated me to use a more open approach to the interview which would more easily remain alive to pluralities and variations in experiences of asylum (Cederberg 2005).

As for non-Romani interviewees, if ‘written policies represent idealised versions of what *might* be or what *should* happen’ (Mountz 2003: 627), doing in-depth interviews offered the opportunity to pull apart the narratives of government and non-government actors in which they articulate their views on the management of ‘Gypsies’ both in alignment and in tension with policy. As Heyman (1995: 264) noted in work on US immigration officers: ‘bureaucratic work is internally conflictive but appears, in the single-stranded relationship to the exterior, to be definitive [...] and rational’. Indeed, the policies of the state are enacted amid tension, conflict and difference. It was therefore essential to contrast and triangulate the data collected through the interviews and participant observation with the results of the analysis of policy and policy-related documents and statements. The interviews with non-refugees had a semi-structured format tailored to the role of the interviewee, with the intent of capturing the link between the framing of issues and the actual actions taken in their daily work.

Some field encounters which started as an individual interview with Roma or Ashkali migrants became a household conversation with family members and friends coming into the conversation at various stages. Occasionally an interview

with members of an NGO became an opportunity to exchange experiences, knowledge, and thoughts on possible future collaborations; other times, a meeting with a social worker turned into a conversation with people working with 'Gypsies' in different positions and at different hierarchical levels in the local authority. There is a significant difference between an open individual interview and a group conversation, as the change of setting inevitably changes the dynamics of the situated encounter and affects the conversation, privileging some voices and silencing others; nonetheless, the group conversations also offered a valuable entry point for observing intra-group dynamics as they became a space where participants could negotiate and test understandings and meanings of their role, behaviour, and positionality (Berg 2007: 144-170).

Participant observation

Participant observation encompasses a range of research strategies which aim to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals and their practices through an intensive involvement over an extended period of time (Lüders 2004). This is a methodology traditionally associated with anthropology, especially after the work of Malinowski (1922) in the Trobriand Islands. The oxymoron 'participant observation' conceals a simultaneously emotional involvement and a search for objectivity. As social worlds cannot be accessed without being part of them at least to some degree, it has been argued that all social research is a form of participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). My approach to the 'field' can be associated with the variant of participant observation termed 'observing participation' (Kaminski 2004), in which the kind of access the ethnographer has to the people of study is more stringently linked to the formulation of the research agenda, questions, and priorities.

Analysing data

The categories and instruments for analysing in-depth interview data were developed in response to the nature of the material collected and have been revised throughout the research. Based on the key research questions, I prepared the topic guides that have provided the guidelines for interviews. The analytical categories are the result of the interchange between material and theoretical prior

knowledge, a recursive process that begins at an early stage of the exploration of the research field when knowledge of literature encounters first-hand experience and offers some ways of understanding it, while simultaneously opening itself to questions.

The identification of analytical categories is therefore not a separate and bounded event in research process. Because of the openness of the interviews, it was important 'not simply to take over the formulation from the questions that were asked, but to consider whether the interviewees actually take up these terms, what the terms mean to them, which aspects they supplement, which they omit' (Schmidt 2004: 254). Through intense revisions, what was initially a general set of categories corresponding in many cases to the points prepared for the interview grid became a detailed list of codes which were adopted to interrogate and analyse the interview transcripts (Silverman 2006).

The codes were then assigned to particular passages in the text. This stage of research was assisted by the use of Atlas/ti, a software package designed to enable researchers to mark segments of data by attaching code words to those segments, and then to search the data, retrieving and collecting all segments identified by the same code or by some combination of code words. In coding transcripts, I adopted an incremental approach; that is, I initially applied fairly descriptive and unproblematic codes to text and then moved towards more abstract and theoretical categories which were revised and updated throughout the whole coding stage. The analytical work on interview narratives requires the researcher to keep a critical stance towards the accounts given. 'This does not mean questioning the validity of the interviewees' statements, but merely adding analytical dimensions that can further explore the narratives, in terms of both presences and silences' (Cederberg 2005: 81).

Matters of locations and comparability

Wimmer and Schiller (2002: 302) argue that applying the 'ethnic lens' to the study of migration has produced an important distortion in migration scholarship and, ultimately, reinforced methodological nationalism, or 'the assumption that the

nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world' (see also Schiller and Caglar 2007; Brettell 2003). Alternatively, Wimmer and Schiller suggest a focus on the city scale as a strategy to obtain insights into migrant pathways to local settlement and transnational connection. However, while this appears a valid suggestion, it must not lead to an underestimation of the power of the state to influence immigrant coping strategies and identity making (Triandafyllidou 2003; Schuster 2005; Morris 2001). The state still matters and is a powerful and flexible actor which plays, through its various articulations, an important role in these processes (Mountz et al. 2002; Ong 1999; Soysal 1994; Zetter et al. 2002). Following Koopmans and Statham (2003: 195-6; see also Koopmans and Statham 2000), 'only theoretical and empirical approaches that do not relegate the nation-state to the domain of insignificance a priori' can tell us something about the comparative relevance and incidence of the various administrative and political dimensions. As discussed earlier, my approach aims to be multidimensional in its attempt to *study through* the discourse, policy and practice related to the management of the 'Gypsy problem', and in doing so, I attempt to show the overlapping of different geographical and administrative dimensions and their interplay.

One of the aims of research is to explore how the 'Gypsy problem' has been governed locally, in particular in relation to the arrival of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali refugees and to compare discourses, policies, and practices in two different cities with specific attention to the way the idea of promoting the closure of local nomad camps was argued and negotiated among different actors and its results (see in particular Chapters 6, 7, 8).

The fieldwork was conducted mainly, but not exclusively for the reasons discussed earlier in relation to the meaning of 'the field', in two locations: Florence and Venice and their 'catchment areas'. By catchment area, I refer to the area into which the social and political relations I have investigated, based initially in the two cities, developed and expanded. It is therefore an area which, although it does not coincide with any specific administrative unit – for example the territory under the jurisdiction of the provincial authorities of Florence and Venice – it is affected by

the different social and political forces present in the territory that negotiate the handling of the 'Gypsy problem' according to different and often contrasting agendas.

The choice of centring my work in Florence and Venice⁵⁰ was not taken at the beginning of research, but rather halfway through when I decided on which aspects of my problematique I would focus more closely. Once I had acquired reasonable understanding of the overall policy framework that governs 'Gypsies' in Italy, and of the key priorities and needs expressed by the people I met during my frequent visits to camps around Italy⁵¹, I had to narrow down the scope of my work in order to go more in depth into the processes I was exploring, and be able to capture the multilayered dimension of governance and discourse on 'Gypsies'.

Researching with, on, for refugees (and Roma)

Social scientists doing research on forced migration often face a dual imperative: producing academically sound research which is at the same time policy relevant (Jacobsen and Landau 2003). But is that possible? Would a more careful consideration of methodological and ethical concerns, as Jacobsen and Landau suggest, offer the solution? While at one level, this seems valid advice – sound research can have an impact on the evidence-based policy discourse – it does not address more structural aspects related to the politics of social research in the field. Two roundtable discussions organised in the context of the Forced Migration Student Conference in 2005 and 2006 with prominent scholars and practitioners in the field addressed this issue specifically. The 2005 roundtable I organised and attended at Oxford Brookes University was entitled 'Research-driven policy or policy driven-research?' The speakers (Floya Anthias, Stephen Castles, Robin Cohen, Giorgia Donà, and Roger Zetter) addressed several aspects of the problematique,

⁵⁰ The case for comparison is outlined in Chapter 8.

⁵¹ Because of my research and my work as an activist, I have a network of contacts spread in many Italian cities through which I can access information on the situations of Roma and Sinti locally. These have provided me with great help in facilitating my visits to nomad camps, and meetings with Roma and Ashkali who otherwise would be quite sceptical towards talking to yet another researcher/journalist.

emphasising the limitations and constraints of policy-driven research. The panel addressed in particular issues related to research agenda setting, the scope of analysis, and the risk of pre-empting any potential contribution to knowledge and failing to challenge the hegemonic discourse on migration and refugees by reproducing unproblematically the policy jargon and agenda. Castles (2005 – unpublished transcription) stressed the link between this kind of research and the failure of migration policy⁵².

Moving from the politics of social research in the field of ‘forced migration studies’ to the micro-politics of fieldwork encounters, I shall now discuss some issues emerging from research with refugees.

Among the actors involved in the policy community I am investigating, Roma and Ashkali migrants and refugees are by far those with the least power of negotiation and are more subjected to the power of labels and hegemonic discursive practice. The process by which they become part of the ‘Gypsy problem’, in which they at once have little, if any, voice, fundamentally shapes their social worlds. However, this does not mean that Roma and Ashkali are passive victims and subjects without agency (Zetter 1991, 2007; Horst 2005; Temple and Moran 2006; Sigona and Torre 2006; Tyldum and Brunovskis 2005).

Addressing this absence of voice and dealing with the concepts of agency and vulnerability without reinforcing common processes of refugee labelling are two crucial elements to take into account (see Sigona 2006a), both as a researcher and an activist. For Cederberg (2005: 68), there is not only a theoretical potential in collecting and analysing migrants’ often unheard voices, but also a political one, namely ‘the extent to which they help challenge stereotypes of and generalisations about ‘other cultures’, by bringing out individuals commonly reduced to those stereotypes, and giving space to their complexity, contingency, agency, and resistance’.

⁵² This also resonates with some criticisms raised by Malkki to ‘refugee studies’ over a decade ago (1995; 1997b).

Taking seriously the voices and opinions of refugees is a priority and a necessity, both methodologically and ethically⁵³, and a flexible ethnographic approach encompassing different qualitative methods seems a valid instrument for achieving this for at least three reasons: firstly it is particularly alive to the experience of the asylum process as transitory, fractured, dispersed, even empty and meaningless (Whyte 2003); secondly it highlights how variously embedded individuals attempt to make sense of situations in particular contexts; and thirdly it is sensitive to the power imbalances which structure that process.

As argued in Chapter 1, an important step in the process of building an understanding of refugee agency in exile consists of placing refugees' narratives within the geo-political history of their country of origin. This approach provides a further dimension to the analysis of the personal narratives, as well as helping to understand their experiences in the country of asylum. In particular, it illuminates their coping strategies as it is in their previous life, experiences, knowledge, and skills that individuals find their way through the harsh conditions and limited opportunities available in Italy (see Horst 2005; Kibreab 1993).

The issue of access was central during the fieldwork. As I shall discuss in the next section, my position played a major role in this process and impacted on my possibility to access or not, and in what way, people in the field. The main difficulty I encountered was getting in touch with Roma and Ashkali outside of the camp, both those who no longer lived in the camps and those who had never lived in nomad camps. Their 'invisibility' to NGOs and social services, although not total, meant I had great difficulties in contacting them, especially in Venice. I tried to overcome this limitation by mobilising different gatekeepers, since only by adopting multiple entry points was it possible to capture the complexity of refugee experiences which are differentiated along many lines. I was aware of the danger of relying on refugee community leaders to speak for 'their' communities (Temple and Moran 2006) since this raises important questions of accountability and representation and generates

⁵³ It seems valid David Turton's admonishment that research into others' suffering can only be justified if alleviating that suffering is an explicit objective (Turton 1996:96; see also Jacobsen and Landau 2003)

consequently a narrowly defined idea of community (Jewkes and Murcott 1998; Griffiths et al. 2005).

Matters of researcher positionality

My first contact with a 'nomad camp' took place in June 1998 when I began fieldwork for research on national and local housing policy and practice for Roma as part of my dissertation in Social Anthropology, in turn part of a degree in Political Sciences in Italy. In parallel, I became involved with a small group of activists in Naples. I was, to adopt Kaminski's definition (2004; see also Bernard 1995:138-139), an *observing participant*. Kaminski in his work *Games Prisoners Play: The Tragicomic Worlds of Polish Prison* (2004: 7) defines this particular research role, in contrast to *participant observation*, with two conditions: '(a) OP enters a community through a similar social process as its other members and is subject to similar rules; (b) OP undertakes field research *as if* he or she was a researcher'. Being a political activist and a researcher influenced the aims and objectives of my research from the beginning and, importantly, directed my attention away from the Roma themselves – a traditional anthropological approach – to the interplay between them and the rest of the social fabric and its institutions.

Being actively involved with Roma initially in Naples, and then nation-wide, enabled me to closely observe the interactions between Roma people and civil servants, politicians, aid-workers, and clergy people. It also provided me with the opportunity to access and participate to informal discussions, and official meetings. As an academic researcher, this type of access would scarcely have been possible (Però 1999; see also Vogler 2007).

My positionality – as a (relatively) young, male, non-Rom, activist, emigrant, researcher, coming from Oxford – affected the results of my work in many ways, some of which came out unexpectedly during fieldwork. It also required me to perform different roles, interact according to different 'rules of engagement' with the people I encountered, and adjust my profile and approach to circumstances.

However, my direct engagement in the field as an advocate for Roma rights and anti-discrimination, and a critic of the way local authorities and some NGOs manage

'Gypsies', also caused, perhaps expectedly, some troubles which inevitably closed some research opportunities. In particular, since the publication of my first book, *Figli del Ghetto* (2002) in which I document the way Romani issues are governed in Naples, my work has frequently been attacked by Opera Nomadi, the main Italian NGO working on 'Gypsies' for being critical of their *modus operandi*.

My positionality needs not only to be acknowledged, but also to be incorporated into the analysis of the material collected during fieldwork. It influenced not only my access to the 'field', but also my interactions with interviewees, and more generally the data collected.

Being an activist and an advocate for Roma rights was also a way of addressing the important issues of trust and mistrust between researcher and respondents. Hynes (2003) alerts us to the importance of addressing this issue when conducting research with refugees, pointing out how the refugee regime and the refugee experience create mistrust at a number of levels – individual, institutional, or societal. However, the roots of mistrust go far beyond this especially considering that I did my research on a community which has experienced stigma over the centuries and has been an 'object' of research for a long time. This calls into question the role of the researcher as well. The following quote from an 'indigenous' researcher powerfully captures this point:

The word itself, 'research' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful (Smith 1999: 1)

Smith also reminds us that research is 'not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions' (Smith 1999: 5). Researchers have a role to play in society which is both practical and theoretical. For Bourdieu (2003: 20), the creation of a 'collective intellectual' is essential for countering the 'quite novel forms that domination assumes' and more specifically the work on 'think tanks' responsible for the 'production and imposition of the neoliberal ideology'. But there is also an everyday practical dimension which comes out of the engagement between ethnographers

and people in the field. With my work I have tried to fulfil these twofold tasks, in particular through my involvement with Roma in Italy through *osservAzione*, an action research working group that I co-founded with a group of colleagues in November 2005. Since then, it has produced three reports on Romani political participation in the electoral process, and on racial discrimination of Roma and Sinti in Italy (see Storia 2009; Sigona 2006b; Sigona and Monasta 2006). Moreover, through its advocacy and rights-based approach, *osservAzione* has contributed to mark a shift in the political discourse on Roma in Italy (at least among leftwing parties and organizations) towards a greater awareness of the frequent and multiple forms of discriminations Roma and other 'Gypsies' experience in Italy and the importance of actively promoting their political participation in society.

Conclusion

In anthropological literature, the fieldwork experience is often characterised as a self-transforming experience, as a *rite of passage* in the ethnographer's career. Nowadays the heuristic value of this metaphor is debated, in particular as a result of the decentring and reconfiguring of the 'field' and its articulation along multiple space and time dimensions, which have made the boundaries of the *rite* blurred and somewhat problematic (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b; Amit 2000; Scarduelli 2003). Such complexity is reflected also in my own experience where the before and after of the fieldwork cannot be clearly marked as the encounter with my research topic in the field started even before the starting of my doctoral research and it is not yet finished even now that I am writing it up. However, there have been different stages in my experience in which the balance between encountering people and *collecting data*, and the reflection and writing process has involved shifting between one side and the other more markedly⁵⁴. When the balance pointed towards the former, the emotional element embedded in the fieldwork experience was stronger (cf. Van Maanen et al. 1993), as well as what I defined 'a distinct state of mind'

⁵⁴ The articles, reports and books in which through the years I have discussed aspects of my research are to some extent a proof of this process.

marked by an unconventional receptivity and openness to situations and events, and a sometimes extreme selectivity in the way these events and situations are interrogated, understood and classified – ‘it is like being on call 24 hours a day’ (fieldnotes, October 2005). When the latter was more prominent, it was as if I had reached a point of theoretical saturation in the research process (Dey 1999). These stages have been always transient as the work has developed further. Nevertheless, they expressed somehow a need (psychological? theoretical?) for closure, for fixing some ideas in a situation of extreme *liquidity* (Bauman 2000, see discussion of the concept in chapter 2) and emotional engagement.

To conduct the critical analysis of the way public policy problems are framed using an ethnographic approach enables the researcher to develop an understanding of policy processes focused on the various actors of the ‘policy community’ involved in the ‘Gypsy problem’. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to explore the ways in which the ‘objects’ of discourse and of labelling experience these processes of representation, thus engaging explicitly with the effects of representation as well as the ways in which persons being represented position themselves in relation to, and are ‘interpellated’ by, these structures.

The geographical scope of the research will serve to illuminate the multi-layered nature of the issue, and shed light on the interplay between different administrative domains. Moreover, the focus on two cities that have explicitly tried to move beyond the camp solution for ‘nomads’, will offer interesting insights into the factors and actors affecting the management of the ‘Gypsy problem’ in the localities.

Finally, by adopting an ethnographic approach I shall try to explore Roma and Ashkali refugees’ experiences of Italian society, and understand their room for manoeuvring within the discursive and political spaces available to them.

PART II. 'NOMADS' AND NOMAD CAMPS IN ITALY

Part 2 explores discourses, policy and practice that define the contour of the 'Gypsy problem' in Italy, analysing in particular the relationship between the dominant characterisation of the Romani communities as 'nomadic' and the existence of so called nomad camps. It reveals how the arrival of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali refugees found local authorities and central government unprepared and, in the absence of adequate asylum reception facilities, the existing camps built for 'nomads' became de facto refugee camps.

CHAPTER FOUR. THE MAKING OF THE 'GYPSY PROBLEM'

Introduction

Without Country you have neither name, token, voice, nor rights, no admission as brothers into the fellowship of the Peoples. You are the bastards of Humanity. (Mazzini 1907 [1860]: 53)

In the superior man, Nomadism enlarges the spirit, educates him to wider intuitions [...], in the inferior man, like the gypsy [...] it creates an instability of character,[...] it distances him from permanent work and facilitates greed for other peoples' possessions and other peoples' women [...]. In the inferior man, nomadism destroys every notion of homeland (Colocci 1889:162).

In her historical analysis of the categorisation of the Romani population in Italy between 1861 and 1914, Illuzzi shows how in parallel to 'the creation of Italians through the powerful forces of nationalism in the late nineteenth century', the newborn state excluded those categorised as 'Gypsies' from the national body' (Illuzzi 2006: 31) considering their 'nomadic lifestyle' as a threat to social order. In a political context marked by general turmoil and insecurity, the 'Gypsies' came to embody an ideal inner enemy (cf. Bauman 1992; Bancroft 1999; Sigona 2003; Sway 1981), one that could be manipulated more comfortably than more powerful external neighbours in the task to 'make the Italians, now that Italy is made', as Massimo D'Azeglio, a prominent Italian politician declared in one of the first sessions of the parliament of the new kingdom. Similarly, Colacicchi (1996: 35) observes that,

Terms such as 'nomads' and 'nomadism' emerged from the Positivist tradition. They do not aim to describe a lifestyle, as they appear to do, so much as serve to discriminate against the Romani people as an 'inferior race', incapable of settling, genetically vagrant.

It is around this time that the academic interest in the 'nomads' rose in Italy, leading to the publication of some substantial monographs on the subject (Colocci 1889; Predari 1841; cf. Marta 1989) and, in parallel with the academic interest, also the interest of political establishment. This link, throughout its various mutations, has

been in place ever since (see Piasere 1991; Marcetti, Mori, Solimano 1994; Brunello 1996; Colacicchi 1996, 1998; Sigona 2002; Marta 2005).

Figure 2: 'Interior of a Gypsy hut', Predari 1841.

Nowadays the 'nomad theory' is often used to provide cultural legitimacy to the marginalization of Roma and Sinti (ERRC 2000). According to Szente:

The question that the wider populace, the authorities, and most of the activists dealing with Roma alike constantly pose themselves is 'how to deal with this socially un-adapted, nomadic population whose traditional, indigenous lifestyle is incompatible with conditions set by a modern, European society (Szente 1997:51)

The description of Roma and Sinti as 'nomads' is not only used in the service of segregating this population, but also in order to reinforce the popular idea that they are not Italians and do not 'belong' to Italy. Piasere's words illustrate this point:

The analogy nomad or Gypsy=foreigner is a constant in our [Italian] collective unconscious. Official actions continually confirm and, in turn, produce the same results: the nomad, as well as the foreigner, is not entitled to the rights of the citizen (Piasere 1996:26).

The offices for 'Nomads and Non-Europeans' are a valid example. They establish the bureaucratic assimilation of Roma and Sinti, amongst whom there are Italian citizens, with foreigners, more specifically immigrants (Piasere 1991).

This chapter investigates the uses and consequences of the label 'nomads' in Italy and the ambiguity embedded in policy which claims to solve '*il problema dei nomadi*' – an expression which, ambiguously, means both the 'nomads' problem' and the 'nomadic problem'. It traces a history of discourse, policy, and practice on 'nomads' and 'refugees' in Italy from the 1960s to the arrival of Romani refugees and migrants from former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The historical overview focuses, in particular, on the encounter, both discursive and factual, between Kosovo Roma and Ashkali and Italian 'nomads', exploring the process by which newcomers, in the absence of an adequate asylum reception system, became socially and discursively constructed as 'nomads' and identified as a 'problem' to be targeted by public policy, media and NGOs alike.

'Nomads' in Italy

Policies [towards Roma] can be broadly grouped into three categories: exclusion, containment and assimilation [...] these categories are not mutually exclusive: they can operate side by side during the same period in different states, or even simultaneously, seemingly in mutual contradiction, within a given state (Liégeois and Gheorghe 1995: 8).

In this section I outline public policy and practice towards the Romani population in Italy over a period of twenty years. The aim is to investigate if, and to what extent, exclusion, containment, and assimilation play a role in the Italian context. For my purpose, I identify broadly two periods: from the second half of the 1960s to the early 1980s, when the experimentation of on-campsite schooling for Romani children marked the first official recognition, although indirect, of the 'Gypsy' as people in Italy; and from the 1980s to the early 1990s, when many Regional authorities passed laws safeguarding the right to nomadism of Roma and Sinti. In the exploration of these historical periods, I will focus in particular on three interconnected aspects: the public representation of Roma and Sinti, the

governance of their mobility and settlement, and issues related to access to welfare provisions and formal education.

The 'discovery' of Roma and Sinti

Contrary to what happened in other European countries (Liégeois 1994), in post-WWII Italy Romani people have not been targeted by specific national legislation. In general, the principles established in the Italian Constitution (1948) which are valid for all citizens, are applied, or applicable, to the members of the Romani population with Italian citizenship. In particular, Article 2 of the Italian Constitution recognises and guarantees the inviolable human rights to any citizen as an individual and as a member of social groups where he/she develops his/her personality; Article 3 states the duty of the Italian Republic to intervene in order for all citizens to experience equal social dignity and to be equal before the law, 'without discrimination of sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, personal or social conditions'; and Art. 6 explicitly states that the Italian Republic 'safeguards by means of appropriate measures linguistic minorities'. The following quote from a former Italian Prime Minister summarises this approach:

In the Italian legal system, there is no interdiction of nomadic lifestyle, nor are there specific norms to which nomads, because of their lifestyle, have to comply with: consequently, the norms in criminal, civil and administrative law are as valid for them as for any residents in the territory of the Republic (Giulio Andreotti cited in Lacio Drom 1973: 5-36)⁵⁵.

However, it should be noted that, although the Italian Constitution solemnly safeguards linguistic minorities, Roma and Sinti were not officially recognised as a linguistic minority and, as a result, the actual protection of their constitutional principles was weaker than for other minorities⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ What seems a plain statement at a closer look reveals some ambivalence, which appears evident if one contrasts it with the accounts of everyday life experiences of Roma and Sinti living in Italy, and the difficulties they encountered in accessing social services, claiming their rights and entitlements, or getting protection from racial discrimination. For a detailed account of the situation of Romani communities in this period, see the journal of Romani studies 'Lacio Drom' published from 1970 to 1999.

⁵⁶ In 1999 the Italian Parliament passed a law for 'the protection of historical linguistic minorities' (n. 482/1999), aiming to give concrete implementation to the principles established in the Art. 6 of the Italian Constitution.

In relation to the governance of Romani mobility and settlement, it should also be noticed that, despite the statement of the Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti (i.e. 'there is no interdiction to the nomadic lifestyle') and Article 16 of the Italian Constitution that states that 'every citizen has the right to reside and travel freely in any part of the national territory except for limitations provided by general laws protecting health or security', road signs prohibiting 'nomads' to park appeared across the entire country in post-World War II Italy. It was only in the early 1970s that the Italian Government, through the Ministry of Interior, intervened on this matter; inviting local authorities to remove them because of violation of the principles established in the Italian Constitution. The legal instruments adopted for this purpose were Ministerial Circulars (*Circolari Ministeriali*)⁵⁷.

The Ministerial Circular n. 17 of 11 October 1973, like the ones in 1982 and 1985, is ambiguously entitled 'Problema dei nomadi' – the title conveys two very different, although not irreconcilable, meanings: the nomads' problem and the nomadic problem. The 1973 act invites local governments to remove obstacles to parking and camping for 'nomads', and 'to examine the possibility of building, in dedicated land, campsites with basic services, in order to make it possible that the camping of nomads is carried out in the best possible hygienic conditions, with obvious impacts on their social promotion and with undeniable advantages for the whole community' (Ministero dell' Interno, n.17 of 11/10/1973).

The 1985 Circular follows the lines traced in the previous ones, and develops them in more detail. The act enlists a set of priorities for local authorities and government representatives. The list includes: to facilitate the inclusion of Romani residents in residence registers; to promote schooling for children; and to abolish interdictions to parking and camping. Importantly, the 1985 Circular condemns local governments' frequent use, allegedly for reasons of public health and safety, of

Initially included among the recognised minority communities, Roma and Sinti were excluded at the last minute from the Law because the government was unable to mobilise enough support in the Parliament, where there was the vehement opposition of the Northern League (see Rizzin 2007; Lapov 2007).

⁵⁷Circulars do not introduce new legislation, rather their task is to specify and clarify the interpretation of existing legislation and, if necessary, to solicit local prefectures (local branches of central government) to intervene in order to remove or correct previous practices and actions.

emergency orders [*Ordinanze sindacali d'urgenza*] to deny to 'nomads' the Constitutional right to mobility and parking. The Circular explains that emergency orders 'only move, together with the nomads, the problems to public hygiene and health that would require instead different measures aimed at the protection and regeneration of those situations deemed hazardous' (Ministero dell'Interno, n.151 of 5/7/1985).

The first official recognition of the specific social and economic disadvantage of the Romani population in Italy came in 1965 when the Ministry of Interior signed a partnership agreement with the Church-inspired organisation *Opera Nomadi* (ON) and the Gypsy Studies Centre at the University of Padua. The main aim of the partnership was to address the situation of disadvantage of Romani children. The Ministry of Interior commissioned ON and the University of Padua to implement nation-wide an educational programme for Romani children living in campsites. The programme, called 'Lacio Drom', had been already piloted in Trentino-Alto Adige Region in the early 1960s (Karpati 1993; Donzello and Karpati 1998).⁵⁸

In Italy, the schooling of 'poor Gypsy children' ['i poveri zingararelli'], Bravi and Sigona (2007) have argued, is at the top of most local and national governments' agenda on Roma and Sinti. In the 1960s access to formal education is seen as an essential requirement for achieving a better integration in society of the Romani population. The creation of parking sites where the Romani families can stop is presented by the supporter of the Gypsy cause as a tool for achieving this end (Karpati 1969, 1975). Schooling becomes a vehicle for social and spiritual promotion of Roma and Sinti who, Karpati argued, in the ongoing process of sedentarisation undergo a regression, 'because the abandonment of Gypsy traditions does not follow the undertaking of new values, which produces as a consequence a situation of anomy' (Karpati 1969:82). The following statement illustrates the link between the creation of official campsites, schooling and the role of non-governmental

⁵⁸ The initial even 'Lacio Drom' classes were in Bolzano (2), Milan (2), Trento (1), Reggio Emilia (1), Pescara (2), Giulianova (1) and Rome (1). A few years later, in 1971, the programme could count on 60 classes (Karpati 1993).

organisations. In 1966, the then president of the ON branch in Trentino Alto Adige stated (Leone Borzaga quoted in *Lacio Drom*, n. 3-4, 1966: 18):

Local authorities should provide, especially in those areas where poor Gypsy children are registered, serviced sites for regulated parking of caravans [...] and promote, with the support of the Ministry of Interior, the creation of charity organisations for nomads, which will focus in particular on schooling and vocational training of the little Gypsies.

A few years later, in 1970, the State gave the *Opera Nomadi* (initially *Opera Assistenza Nomadi*) the status of 'Ente Morale' (Decree of the President of the Republic, n. 347/1970). The recognition gave ON the moral authority to present itself as the voice of the Romani communities in Italy, a role that has endured, despite several instances of contestation, for over forty years (cf. Spinelli 2003).

The ON's recognition as Ente Morale also initiates what will become a significant feature of the way the Italian government prefers to deal with the Romani population: that is by subcontracting to NGOs and other third sector agencies the provision of social services for the Romani population. This transfer of state responsibility to the third sector is problematic for a number of reasons. For NGOs, there is great difficulty in preserving their independence and critical voice whilst working as subcontractors for national and local authorities. Also, and more substantially, NGOs' long-term involvement in policy making and implementation raises questions as to how much their work has contributed to the situation of segregation and marginalisation that Romani are subjected to today, considering the fact that some NGOs have been involved in policy making and implementation in this field for decades (Piasere 1991; Sigona 2002).

For the State and local authorities, while it is convenient, both economically and politically, to get other non-governmental actors involved, including some potential critics, it should be noticed that the terms of reference for these forms of cooperation, as well as the expectations attached to them were often left vague (cf. Ascoli 1984; Marcon 2004). Perhaps this is why the Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1975 stated: 'It seems to me that after a dozen years of existence of Opera

Nomadi, things for the Gypsies have stayed as they were ten years ago (cited in Karpati 1975: 34).

Regional laws 'in favour of' Roma and Sinti

Legislation, for its effects, contributes to feeding and reinforcing those aspects of the image of the Gypsy that are indispensable to it. [...] Legislation makes the Gypsy live uncertainty, and then calls him uncertain [...]. The law feeds itself on that image. The image in turn helps to rationalise it. And the image is, hence, re-strengthened by it (Liégeois 1980:28).

In the 1980s and early 1990s, eleven out of 20 regions plus the autonomous province of Trento (see table 1 below) adopted laws aimed at 'the protection of Gypsies' and 'their nomadic culture'. The first law ('Measures for safeguarding the culture of Roma and Sinti', n.41/1984, amended a few years later by Law n.54/1989) was approved in 1984 by Veneto. These laws marked an important step towards the recognition of Roma and Sinti as an ethnic and cultural minority, although, notably, this has not taken place on a national level.

Figure 3: Regional laws in defence of Roma and Sinti

Region	Year of publication and revision	Title
Emilia Romagna	L.R. n.47, 12 January 1988 L. R. n.34, 22 August 1993	Measures for the nomadic minorities in Emilia Romagna. [Norme per le minoranze nomadi in Emilia Romagna]
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	L. R. n. 11, 20 June 1988 L.R. n. 25, 24 June 1991	Measures for safeguarding 'Romani' culture. [Norme a tutela della cultura 'Rom']
Lazio	L.R. n. 82, 25 May 1985	Measures in favour of Roma. [Norme in favore dei Rom]
Liguria	L.R. n. 21, 27 August 1992	Measures for safeguarding the Gypsy and nomadic peoples. [Interventi a tutela delle popolazioni zingare e nomadi]
Lombardia	L.R. n. 77, 22 December 1989	Regional Action plan for the safeguarding of peoples belonging to traditionally nomadic and semi-nomadic ethnic groups. [Azione regionale per la tutela delle popolazioni appartenenti alle etnie tradizionalmente nomadi e seminomadi]
Marche	L.R. n.3, 5 January 1994	Measures in favour of emigrants, immigrants, refugees, stateless people, nomads, and their families. [Interventi a favore degli emigranti, degli immigrati, dei rifugiati, degli apolidi, dei nomadi e delle loro famiglie]
Piemonte	L.R. n. 26, 10 June 1993	Measures in favour of the Gypsy population [Interventi a favore della popolazione zingara]
Sardegna	L.R. n.9, 9 March 1988	Measures for protecting nomads' culture and ethnicity. [Tutela dell'etnia e della cultura dei nomadi]
Toscana	L.R. n.17, 1988 L.R. n.73, 8 April 1995 L.R. n.2, 12 January 2000	Measures for Roma and Sinti peoples. [Interventi per i popoli Rom e Sinti]
Provincial Authority of Trento	L.P. n.15, 2 September 1985	Measures for protecting Gypsies. [Norme a tutela degli zingari]
Umbria	L.R. n.32, 27 April 1990	Measures for promoting the inclusion of nomads in society and for protecting their identity and cultural heritage. [Misure per favorire l'inserimento dei nomadi nella società e per la tutela della loro identità e del loro patrimonio culturale]
Veneto	L.R. n. 41, 16 August 1984 L.R. n. 54, 22 December 1989	Measures for safeguarding the culture of Roma and Sinti. [Interventi a tutela della cultura dei Rom e dei Sinti]

As shown in the table, the titles of the laws varies but they share a common emphasis conveyed by the use of terms such as 'a tutela di' (for safeguarding) and 'in favore di' (in favour of). The laws adopt different ethnic labels to identify their beneficiaries: for example, while in Veneto the beneficiaries are 'Roma and Sinti' and their culture, in Emilia Romagna they are the 'nomadic minorities' living in the region, and in Piedmont the 'Gypsies'. Such variety, while revealing the legislators' difficulty in identifying exactly who are the beneficiaries of the legislation, is also indicative of the complex and undefined nature of the reality that the legislation tries to capture and discipline. The definition provided by the regional law of Lombardia (L.R. n. 77/1989), offers an interesting example of this struggle. To the point of sounding tautological, art.1 paragraph 3 states: 'for the purpose of this law,

by nomads we refer to individuals belonging to ethnic groups traditionally nomads and semi-nomads’.

As Marta (1994: 249) has validly noticed, ‘for regional and local authorities that develop policy for Roma and Sinti, the exonym comes to represent a key element of policy making’. The relationship between labels and policy is further developed by French sociologist Liégeois. Liégeois focuses in particular on the role of stereotyping in the political discourse and in the policy making process:

Political discourse [...] makes an extensive use of stereotyping, both in the way Gypsies and Travellers are represented in legislative texts and by the labels adopted during the policy making process (Liégeois 1994: 156).

The following paragraph from the preface to the regional law of Veneto offers a pertinent example of the ambiguity underpinning these laws:

The parking of these groups [Roma and Sinti] caused and still causes problems of different sorts with respect to the relationship with locals as well as issues of public order. Addressed *a posteriori* or only in repressive terms, these problems did not disappear, on the contrary, they became even more visible, and sometimes worsened; it is therefore necessary to address them *a priori*, through a combination of measures designed to prevent them, or at least to limit their impact (L.R. Veneto, n.41/1984).

The approval of regional laws was a response to increasing protests against Roma in many cities which urged politicians to intervene to tackle local tensions (Piasere 1985; Karpati 1993). The growing international political mobilisation of Romani people that followed the 1971 founding congress of the International Romani Union in London (Acton 1997; Acton and Klimova 2001; Klimova-Alexander 2005) and, domestically, the work of Opera Nomadi also contributed to create the momentum for these initiatives (Piasere 1985).

A common element to all of these regional laws is the recognition of nomadism as a fundamental cultural trait of Roma and Sinti. Following from this premise, the laws solemnly safeguard the right to nomadism and to parking in regional territory and, as a matter of consequence, invite local authorities to build campsites for this population.

A comparative reading of the regional laws shows several commonalities among them and enables the identification of some thematic nodes which I will now discuss. The several commonalities – a commentator ironically suggested labelling them ‘Xerox laws’ (Piasere 1985) – are the result of two interconnected factors: firstly the lobbying work done by Opera Nomadi, which had branches in all the regions, and secondly the lack of institutional knowledge of the local Roma and Sinti population (Sigona 2001) which resulted in much emphasis being put on the ‘real gypsy’ myth and the measure to preserve it (cf. Sibley 1995; Willelms 1997)⁵⁹.

Whilst the core themes are common to all laws, with the exception of the Regional Law of Marche (L.R. n.3/1994) which deals with the ‘nomads’ in a more general law on immigration and emigration, what varies is the degree of detail of objectives, modalities and resources for achieving the main common aim of protecting nomadism.

At the core of all laws is the housing issue, which stems directly from the recognition of the right to an itinerant lifestyle and the aim of protecting nomadism. To this end, regional laws invite municipalities and other local authorities to build two types of campsites: long stay or permanent camps for ‘settled or quasi settled nomads’ (L.R. of Lombardia n. 77/1989) and short stay camps ‘for nomads willing to preserve their itinerant lifestyle’ (idem). However, the regional laws do not prescribe local authorities to intervene on this matter. The only incentive for local authorities to follow the regional guidelines comes from the prospect of accessing regional funding (Fondazione Michelucci 1998b; Colacicchi 1996). A general comparison of the budget allocation in the various regions over the years is outside the reach of this research; however, anecdotal evidence shows that in some regions, few applications were received by local authorities over the years and funding was left unspent. As a result, some regional authorities did not allocate any further resources from their budgets for the implementation of the laws (Sigona 2001; Brunello 1996; Fondazione Michelucci 1998b)

⁵⁹ Interestingly several regional laws include a survey of regional Romani population among their objectives.

Whilst the interest in Romani culture, which regional laws claim to safeguard, is shared, at least rhetorically, by most NGOs supporting Roma and Sinti, what is less clear is what stands behind the label 'culture' and what idea of 'culture' underpins the regional laws (cf. Picker 2008). To define a culture, especially if it is somebody else's culture, is a complex and potentially risky (for those affected) operation, and the risk increases when this is done in the text of a law. The main risk is the essentialisation of what is a dynamic and relational set of meanings (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a). 'Culture' as defined in the regional laws is detached from the socio-political context, appearing as a set of rites, customs, and uses coming out of an Edenic past which risk disappearing in capitalist Western society⁶⁰ (Sigona 2005a; Piasere 1999, 2005); this set of traditions is sometimes represented as the cause of alleged Romani underdevelopment, other times as a collection from which to choose what items to preserve and what to discard.

Picking up cultural aspects which seem more socially and politically acceptable to those in power, cultural aspects looked at outside their context and their historical trajectory and rationale, becomes a way of denying processes of change and transformation; a way of crystallising culture and turning it into a cabinet of curiosities. In the regional laws for Roma and Sinti this is visible, for example, in the attempt to revive so-called 'traditional jobs' (see, for example, Regional Laws of Toscana, Emilia Romagna, Lombardia and Lazio) which, due to modernity and economic transformations, are fast dying out. What is left unclear is how this rescue operation should work without a more general and radical transformation of economy and society.

An exception, at least in the wording of the law, is art.1 paragraph 2 of the Regional Law of Friuli Venezia Giulia where is stated:

⁶⁰ Piasere (2005) has recently perspicaciously discussed the contrast and the relationship between the stereotypical image of the 'gypsy', with the reality of the nomad camps and the way in which the 'gypsy problem' is dealt with in Verona.

The Region safeguards [...] the specific cultural values, the historical identity and *the processes of transformation ongoing among Roma* (L.R. Friuli V.G., n. 11/1988; emphasis added).

In conclusion, the majority of Regional Laws were passed during the '80s and early 1990s, and were rarely updated⁶¹. They are discursively constructed around the protection of nomadism, which is presented as the core feature of Romani culture, to the extent that the label 'nomadi' has become the politically correct term adopted to refer to the whole Roma and Sinti population. They respond to the needs of a reality that, to a large extent, no longer exists, and has been profoundly changed by new migration flows starting from the 1990s. It is now broadly accepted that many of the groups currently living in Italy, especially those arrived from the Balkans and Romania since the 1970s, settled in urban areas and are now living a sedentary-like lifestyle. Their motivations for migration were not an atavist desire for vagrancy – as many in Italy still seem to believe – but were rather a search for a better life and, for many, for survival, as war and political turmoil had made their countries of origin unsafe for them (CDGM 1995; Matras 1997; Sobotka 2003). Once in Italy, newcomers encountered poor institutional welfare support and found shelter in authorised and unauthorised camps where they lived under constant threat of eviction (Brunello 1996)⁶².

There is a distance between the everyday lives of Roma and Sinti - a 'world of worlds' in Piasere's terms (1999) - and the image of the Gypsy on which the laws are based and that they contribute to produce.

⁶¹ Among the few exceptions the regional authorities of Tuscany and Veneto. For an in depth discussion, see: Colacicchi 1995; Tosi Cambini 2006; Picker 2008.

⁶² Also for Italian Sinti, traditionally more engaged in itinerant activities, the process of sedentarisation has been ongoing since the 1960s as a consequence of a number of coexisting processes, namely: changing economic strategies following a more general process of urbanisation and industrialisation of the country, the use of caravans and faster means of transport, the significant reduction of areas for stopping, the bureaucratisation of parking and tougher controls by local police (Trevisan 2005).

'Refugees' and/or 'nomads'

In this section I outline public policy and practice towards the Romani population in Italy from the 1990s to the early 2000s when Yugoslavian Roma and Ashkali fleeing from persecution, war and its consequences began to arrive and settle in Italy. My discussion of the encounter between Romani forced migrants and Italian 'nomads' is developed on two interconnected levels: on the one side, I aim to show how the absence of an adequate asylum reception system forced the newcomers into nomad camps; on the other hand, I intend to emphasise how the discourse on 'nomads' provided a framework and justification for the failure of the Italian asylum system to protect and support Romani refugees⁶³.

To understand the dynamics of this encounter, it is crucial to take into account the timing of Balkan Romani migration towards Italy (cf. Matras 1997). Its start anticipated by a decade the enlargement of the EU and the migration movements that the enlargement produced. The arrival in countries such as Italy of a significant number of Romani migrants from the early 1990s onwards brought back into the spotlight what had become at the time a less visible issue, and reignited social fear of the 'Gypsies'.

The 1991 Ministry of Interior Circular (n.4 of 18/1/1991) entitled 'Settlements for nomads, Gypsies and non-EU country nationals: activities of monitoring and control' captures the changing attitude towards these communities. From the title it is evident that the rationale and intentions behind this document are different from the three previous ones (1973, 1982, 1985) in which the term 'problem' encompassed both control and solidarity. The aim here is to respond to the growing concern in the public opinion about the 'threat' represented by the arrival of Roma

⁶³ In her analysis of the discourse of the EU institutions on 'Gypsies' and 'Roma', Katrin Simhandl (2006) reveals the existence of a dividing line that separates the limited debate on the situation of Western European 'Gypsies' in the 1970s and 1980s and the current high-profile discussion on the situation of Eastern European 'Roma'. Nowadays this schism is visible in, and to some extent perpetuated by, the divergence of treatment that EU institutions devotes to those who belong to (or are associated with) these groups depending on their country of origin, namely EU new member states and old member states; but also, on a different level, in the contrast between the vocabulary of minority rights and the centrality of the ethnic factor in the definition of Eastern 'Roma', and the prevalence in old EU member states of 'nomadism' as the main identity marker of Western 'Gypsies'.

and other migrants from the Balkan region. The security concern provides the dominant frame for this Circular (Marta 2005) that, for example, interprets the episodes of intolerance and racism against Roma and Sinti occurring at the time – ‘episodes of open and at times violent hostility’ (Ministero dell’Interno 1991) – as a response to some of the behaviours and customs held by the ‘nomads’, namely ‘begging, fortune telling and crimes against private property and those related to drug trafficking’ (ibidem). The 1991 Circular responds to these perceived threats by promoting a firmer policy of control and surveillance of the Romani population involving, among the other measures, ‘accurate and systematic inspections of large settlements inhabited by nomads, Gypsies and non-EU nationals’ (ibidem). Interestingly, the Circular also stresses that ‘such inspections should not result in the creation of nominal registers or in a sort of census’ (ibidem). Nonetheless, this principle has been contravened several times as most local authorities routinely conduct informal censuses of the resident Roma and Sinti population and the police visit encampments and collect personal data on residents (see Karpati 1999).

The arrivals of Romani forced migrants from former Yugoslavia pushed the ‘Gypsy problem’ back in the political agenda and forced political actors to deal with it. How they did is the key point that needs to be investigated. My argument is that lack of interpretative and bureaucratic frames capable of defining and governing the new presence – mainly Bosnian, Serbian, Macedonian and Kosovo Roma (and Ashkali) escaping from war and its consequences – was compensated for by the adoption of pre-existing cultural and policy frames rooted in the image of the ‘nomadic Gypsy’ and normally applied to Italian indigenous Roma and Sinti (Sigona 2003). The front-page of the Italian weekly *Panorama* on 20 August 1999 captures this discursive confusion: a photo showing a rusted boat overloaded with Roma and Ashkali refugees from Kosovo is accompanied by the headline: ‘Mama, the Gypsies are coming!’.

Seeking asylum in Italy

Two elements are crucial for defining the institutional and policy framework at the time of the arrival of these new migrants: the regional laws safeguarding nomadic culture, and the (almost non-existent) Italian asylum system. As regional laws were

discussed earlier, in this section I shall focus my attention on the Italian asylum system.

From its unification in 1861 to the years of economic boom in the 1960s, Italy has always featured among the countries of emigration (Maciotti and Pugliese 1991; Corti and Sanfilippo 2009). Italy's long and intense experience of migration is characterized by two main features: first, the vast number of emigrants sent abroad – more than 26 million since official records began in 1876 (Favero 1978); second, the dramatic switch, in the last three decades from being a land of mass emigration to one of mass immigration (King and Andall 1999). The switch, statistically, occurred in 1972 when in-migration exceeded out-migration for the first time. This is the result of three different migration trends: the constantly declining flow of emigrants (since its peak in the early 60s); the steady profile of return migration, which was the initial force which reversed Italy's migration balance in the early 1970s; and the significant rise in immigration. The impact of such a change found the country quite unprepared in legal, policy and psychological terms.

Hence, the Italian role in the system of international migration changed drastically in the 1980s. The country became the final destination for more and more immigrants⁶⁴. At the same time, the number of people seeking international protection also increased considerably (cf. Glynn 2008). Despite Italy's having ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees by Law no. 277 of 24 July 1954 and the 1967 Protocol amending the Geneva Convention in 1972, no asylum system was in place until 1990. Throughout much of the Cold War period Italy transported refugees rather than settled them (Einaudi 2007). The number of those seeking asylum in Italy rose from over 2,000 in 1980 to over 11,000 in 1987, mainly because of easier access to tourist permits for citizens of the Soviet Union and satellite states during the 1980s. However, as a UNHCR officer in

⁶⁴ A key feature of Italy's approach to migrant issues is well highlighted by Andall's analysis on second-generation migrants (2002). She noted that, despite the presence of migrant communities already into the second-generation, 'public and political attention has continued to focus on new waves of migration and especially on undocumented migration. As a consequence, the conditions of settled communities have tended to be of peripheral concern to immigration social policy makers' (Andall 2002: 389; see also Schierup et al 2007; Sciortino and Colombo 2003).

the late 1980s commented: 'In Italy anyone can have asylum... but what asylum? To live off air, off the sun, to not eat? ... If you can't give a person the right to work, to live adequately, one can't really talk of asylum' (reported in Maciotti and Pugliese 1991: 155).

Despite the steady growth in immigration throughout the 1970s, the migration issue only began to assume national prominence in the mid-1980s. Prior to this, the Italian response to the needs of migrant workers was largely left to the Catholic voluntary sector, fronted by the organisation Caritas. This initial leading position of the Catholic voluntary sector left a strong imprinting on the terms of the public debate on migration. For King and Andall, 'the Catholic ethos underpinning the strategy of Caritas stands in conflict with the development of restrictive stances with regard to immigration in both Italy and Europe' (1999: 152).

When the so-called 'Legge Martelli' (n. 39/1990) (Martelli Law named after the then Minister of Justice who drafted it) came into force, there were 780,000 foreigners in Italy. This law represented the first attempt in Italy to lay down a comprehensive framework of procedures and instruments to regulate immigration and asylum. In 1996, the first Centre-Left government of the post-war period was elected in Italy. After two years the government introduced a new immigration law which was intended to mark a radical change in the handling of immigration, 'signifying a step forward from some of the emergency measures which had preceded it' (King and Andall 1999:154). The Centre-Right coalition won the 2001 political election capitalising on the fear of a mass invasion of migrants into Italy. Two parties in the government coalition, the Northern League and the National Alliance, had very outspoken anti-immigration positions. Significantly, the new Alien Act (Law n. 189/2002, 'Modifica alla normativa in materia di immigrazione e di asilo' [Amendments to the legislation on immigration and asylum]) took its name from the leaders of these two parties: Umberto Bossi and Gianfranco Fini.

The key event which pushed the Italian government to develop an asylum reception policy was the mass influx of displaced people escaping wars or situations of turmoil and violence in the Balkans during the 1990s. The first to arrive were the Albanians, followed by displaced people from former Yugoslavia. In the case of the latter, the

flow decreased only with the signature of the Dayton agreements in 1995. In 1997 the second mass arrival of Albanians triggered a clear change in the Italian approach. From those who were initially called 'our cousins', Albanians were soon to occupy the role of dangerous foreigners in Italy's xenophobic map (Mai 2002; King and Mai 2008). In 1998 a large number of Kurds arrived from Turkey and Iraq followed by Kosovo refugees escaping from ethnic cleansing.

Government responses to the increasing number of displaced people landing in Italy were varied. The arrival of Albanian migrants in the early 1990s forced the government to develop some kind of legal framework for the newcomers, but even then the answer was an ad hoc system rather than a comprehensive and universal system. Consequently, when forcibly displaced migrants from Yugoslavia began to arrive, the government opted for the granting of temporary protection (and assistance), rather than firmer levels of status (Zetter et al. 2002). The use of temporary protection 'managed to reduce to the minimum the number of asylum claims submitted by former Yugoslavs who sought international protection in Italy (about 80,000 people were granted temporary protection during that period)' (Vincenzi 2000:96). The temporary protection scheme implied very minimal social support and no right to work legally (Schuster 2005; Marchetti 2006; Korac 2003).

In 1997, following the second mass flow of Albanians, the Italian government secured assistance and temporary protection for over 16,500 displaced people. Nevertheless, the Albanians did not receive work permits and once the emergency in Albania was declared solved, a large number of them were repatriated.

However by 1998, the government adopted different measures for the significantly new flow of arrivals of Kurds from Iraq and Turkey. In this case the government decided to handle their claims under the ordinary asylum procedure rather than temporary protection. Up to 1998 the use of temporary protection had to be decreed by a parliamentary law, a legislative provision which requires a long procedural time and therefore does not respond to the demands of emergency situations. Law n. 286/1998 (Legge Turco Napolitano) introduced an article (n.18) which gave the President of the Council of Ministers the power to grant the temporary protection by Prime Ministerial decree.

This instrument was first used on 12 May 1999, to provide retrospective temporary protection to displaced people from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from the start of the NATO bombing campaign (24 March 1999) to the official end of the conflict (5 August 1999); and about 20,000 people benefited from this procedure. No permission to stay under the provisions of this temporary protection was issued after this date. Kosovo Roma, fleeing from persecution by returned ethnic Albanians, were the most affected (Sigona 2003, 2004).

Such a widespread use of temporary protection explains at least in part the limited number of asylum applications during the 1990s (see table below).

Figure 4: Asylum applications in Italy 1991-2001

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Asylum applications	24442	2588	1568	1844	648	680	1887	13119	33364	15564	9755
Geneva status	1203	151	168	320	103	204	397	1045	809	1642	2098

Source: Italian Ministry of Interior, 2002.

Roma and Ashkali forced migrants in Italy

As mentioned earlier, the arrival of Roma from Yugoslavia in Italy had started at the end of the 1970s, but only with the worsening of the economic and social situation in the country and the beginning of the conflict did the flow of Roma become numerically significant and socially visible. When the Yugoslavian Roma arrived in Italy, fleeing from war and persecution, there was no working asylum system in place.

In July '99, in a talk show on the Kosovo conflict, an army general was asked about the nature of the new flow of displaced people from Kosovo. He replied with a warning to the Italian audience: 'On those boats', he said, 'there are bogus refugees who want to take advantage of our generosity. They pretend to be Kosovars but they are nomads!' (see Sigona 2003).

Statements like this echo the magazine headline mentioned earlier and encapsulate a number of pertinent issues. Firstly, it confirms the rootedness of the nomadic discursive frame and, by portraying the displaced migrants as people trying to disguise their 'real' identity, it also reiterates the established 'truism' that all

nomads are liars. Secondly, it enables us to catch a glimpse of the nexus between the nomadic frame and Italian policy towards the Romani communities – i.e. ‘this people do not deserve protection because they are not genuine refugees’. Thirdly, it highlights a discursive short circuit where being a ‘nomad’, without a homeland or a fixed abode, is incompatible with being a ‘refugee’, hence forced to leave one’s own home.

To confirm the nexus between discourse and policy, it may be useful to recall that in roughly the same period as the talk show, the Italian Minister of the Interior, Rosa Russo Iervolino, dispatched a ministerial circular to all police local headquarters and border check-points stating that the Prime Minister’s Decree ‘Extraordinary Measures for FRY Citizens’ Reception’ was no longer applicable due to the fact that the war was officially over.

However, concerns expressed by the UNHCR, national NGOs and civil society groups against the decision of the minister ensured that the situation normalised after a few weeks, the solution being that forced migrants who did not receive the humanitarian status *ex decreto*, were allowed to claim asylum through the ‘normal’ procedure.

It is estimated that over 10,000 Roma arrived in Italy during the spring/summer of 1999. Most Roma who fled from war and persecution in the Balkans possess no legal status in Italy (Bergman 1999; see also Servizio Comune 2004). They, ECRI (2002) reports, ‘have benefited comparatively less than other groups from the various opportunities for regularization’. Roma and Ashkali refugees came with their families and limited economic resources, and had to find their way in the Italian society with not much support.

It is during this period that makeshift settlements of huts and shacks began to appear under motorway and rail junctions, near garbage dumps, and along dangerous and inhabitable river banks often in the most neglected, least wealthy and least controlled areas of cities (cf. Sibley 1995). These makeshift settlements were soon given the label of ‘nomad camps’, a label which had until then been used to refer mainly to official campsites built for long-established Roma and Sinti.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a judge of the Kingdom of Italy, commenting on the failure of the newborn state to implement the decade old 'bans against Gypsies', solicits a firm intervention by the state to 'free *our* territory from this race of foreign vagabonds for whom I think surveillance is never excessive nor unfruitful' (Capobianco 1914: 103). Such measures, Capobianco argues, would be justified and legitimated by 'the historical reasons that accompany them' (idem: 114). Capobianco's words present once again the idea that 'nomads' are not part of 'us' and they belong to a 'race' of foreigners that, because of their mobility and lifestyle, are particularly threatening for 'settled' society. To prove his point and justify draconian repressive measures, Capobianco refers to 'historical reasons' that, however, he does not spell out since, I would argue, these are so deeply seated in the public imagination that they are part of the dominant accepted 'truths' about Romani communities. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the existence of previous bans become *per se* a way of legitimising the need for more repressive policy towards the 'nomads'. In other words, previous draconian policy initiates a self-propelling chain of restrictive and draconian public policy in which each recall one another as justification for their own existence. This can be taken as an example of the circularity of the relationship between stereotypes, labelling, and policy making. However, one should be aware that circularity is just a tendency and, in some crucial respect, an illusion. Stereotypes, prejudices, and labels get established and reified through history, and with them the imagined communities and nations which are shaped through and around them. Stereotypes, and the policy measures based on them, are respectively interpretative and normative frames on which we rely for understanding, classifying, and managing current circumstances. They are social and cultural constructs that shape and frame circumstances, and in turn are shape and transformed by them, demonstrating an extraordinary resilience.

In this chapter, I have analysed the uses of the label 'nomads' within what I termed the nomadic discursive frame (cf. Simhandl 2009) and its interplay with institutional policy and practice aiming at disciplining the Romani population. The historical outline has shown how disciplining, in the Foucauldian sense (cf. chapter 2) is

achieved through policing as much as through social assistance and schooling, confirming Gheorghe and Liégeois' remark (1995) that a policy of control, exclusion, and assimilation are not 'mutually exclusive'; rather they coexist and overlap. I have emphasised the ambiguity embedded in 1970s policy for solving the 'problema nomadi' as well as that ingrained in the regional laws for 'safeguarding Gypsy/Romani/nomadic culture(s)', where I have analysed in particular the concept of culture. In the 1990s, the arrival of Yugoslav forced migrants reignited the debate on the 'Gypsy problem' and shifted the discourse more towards the control side of the spectrum.

However, there is another important side to incorporate in the discussion, namely the Italian discourse and policy on refugees. In this chapter, I have observed how the arrival of Romani forced migrants from former Yugoslavia produced also a discursive (dis)encounter between the 'nomads' and the 'refugees', which, because of the weakness of the 'refugee' discursive and policy frames, resulted in newcomers being assimilated in the nomadic frame and policy. I have argued that this happened mostly as a result of the absence of an adequate asylum reception system and the unpreparedness of Italian authorities – a recurring trait in Italian asylum policy (Zetter et al. 2002; Sigona 2005b; Macioti and Pugliese 1991; Einaudi 2007; Glynn 2008).

CHAPTER FIVE. NOMAD CAMPS: A GEOGRAPHY AND A GENEALOGY

Introduction

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI 2002: 20) has on a number of occasions expressed its concern for the living conditions in Italian nomad camps, but also 'for the fact that the segregation of Roma/Gypsies in Italy appears to reflect the general approach of the Italian authorities, who tend to consider Roma as nomads who want to live in camps'⁶⁵. In 1999, similar concerns were expressed by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD 1999: 220) which declared that 'in addition to a frequent lack of basic facilities, living in the camps not only leads to the Roma's physical segregation from Italian society, but their political, economic and cultural isolation as well'. The following year, the European Roma Rights Centre, an international human rights advocate, defined Italy as 'campland' (ERRC 2000). On December 2005, the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR 2006) ruled that, by policy and practice, Italy systemically violates the right to adequate housing established in the European Social Charter (revised) where Roma are concerned.

More recently, in their submission to the CERD in advance of the Committee's upcoming review of Italy's compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, a coalition of human rights organisations points out how:

Many Roma and Sinti in Italy live in highly substandard conditions, without basic infrastructure. [...] Material conditions in authorised and unauthorised camps are frequently inhuman. (ERRC et al 2008: 28).

In this chapter I aim to show how nomad camps are positioned at a crucial point of conjunction of spatial, social and political terrains, where labels and stereotypes are

⁶⁵ ECRI's view was recently confirmed in the third report on Italy published in May 2006 (ECRI 2006).

reified through housing policy which, in turn, by physically confining the 'nomads' in camps, contribute to further their social exclusion and represent an obstacle to their participation in the polity.

The expression 'nomad camps' is broadly employed in the public discourse as a short cut to refer to a variety of urban settlements inhabited by Roma and Sinti, including both publicly-funded and informal settlements. According to Piasere (2006), at present, in Italy, there are five types of camps for 'Gypsies': the first type is self-managed camps in marginal urban areas, created by the arrival in different stages of families or group of families. These camps are transient installations that may or may not become permanent through time and are subject to frequent partial or total forced evictions by local authorities. Sometimes, however, they are 'tolerated' and even receive some forms of social support. The second type is self-managed camps in areas allocated by local authorities. These are provided with basic site services and control over these areas is quite strict. The third type is camps built and managed by local authorities. These are run directly or via subcontractor(s) by the local authorities and have sets of rules that residents have to comply with. The fourth type is camps managed by local authorities but which have developed a village-like life with shops, bars and cafés. The fifth type is very volatile encampments which are 'invisible' so as to escape label and local authority gaze. They are located in very marginal areas, hidden in disused buildings, along riverbanks or under railway and motorway bridges. Their number increased significantly in recent years with the arrival of Romanian Roma (Sigona 2008a).

This chapter reflects upon the camp as the spatial dimension of the 'Gypsy problem' (cf. Sigona 2005a). By engaging with nomad camps along two dimensions, one genealogical and the other geographical, it aims to provide a framework for interpreting and understanding the ethnographic material discussed later in the thesis.

The first part is an analysis of the discourse on nomad camps at a crucial stage in the development of camp policy in Italy, between the 1960s and the 1970s, when for the first time some local authorities, with the support of voluntary organisations and scholars, debated and developed policy initiatives in this direction. The main

emphasis will be on the debate on campsites and 'the root causes' of Roma and Sinti socio-economic marginality. This will offer an interesting perspective for observing the recent history of some *topoi* which play an important role in the current debate on the 'Gypsy problem' in Italy.

In the second part, the focus will be placed on the current reality of nomad camps in Italy, and the interplay between the spatial and the social in defining, shaping and reifying the 'Gypsy problem'.

The chapter concludes with an overview on the present debate on what seems to be a shift in the housing paradigm for Romani communities: the closing down of camps.

'Nomad camp': a genealogy⁶⁶

Based primarily on material published in the Italian journal of Romani Studies 'Lacio Drom', this section aims to analyse the debate around the building of 'campsites for nomads' in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and aims to offer some insights on the origin, both material and discursive, of current nomad camps.

A key role in this history is played by Opera Nomadi (ON) – established in 1963 in Bolzano and successively recognised as 'Ente Morale' (Decree of the President of the Republic n. 347/1970). These were the years of the widespread use by local authorities of parking prohibitions targeted specifically at 'nomads' and their caravans, when the Ministry of Interior had not yet issued its first Circular on the 'nomads' problem/nomadic problem' in defence of the right to nomadism (11 October 1973: see Chapter 4). Especially in the north of Italy, itinerant Roma and Sinti with caravans were subjected to frequent evictions by local police and were perpetually on the move in search of quieter places to stop. This strategy of eviction rather than offering an alternative to Roma and Sinti families, was adopted by most

⁶⁶ Foucault's genealogy is not the search for origins. Instead, it is a history of the present that seeks to trace the plural and sometimes contradictory influences and power/knowledge struggles encapsulated in modern institutions and technologies of power (Foucault 1997).

northern cities and towns and was a short-sighted policy which only removed 'the problem' temporarily from one town by transferring it to another. For the Roma and Sinti in the North of Italy, a consequence of being continuously on the move was that children were unable to attend school with any continuity. This was a cause of concern for volunteers and civil servants alike, but also in academic circles there was interest in Romani children's education (or lack of education) (Bravi and Sigona 2006).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, education was a priority in Opera Nomadi's agenda from the beginning, and in the mid 1960s, with the support of local and central authorities, volunteers and local teachers, ON launched a schooling project called 'Lacho Drom' which was aimed at facilitating Romani children's access to schooling, and consisted essentially in creating special classes for Gypsy children of primary school age⁶⁷.

The material found in the journal of Romani Studies 'Lacio Drom' and in other works published in those years is important because, while it offers some relevant information on the life of Roma and Sinti in Italy at the time, it also sheds light on the idea of 'the Gypsy' underpinning the work of volunteers, activists, and civil servants, thus offering some important insight into the aims and objectives of such initiatives⁶⁸.

⁶⁷ The special classes 'Lacio Drom' were established in 1965 and were aimed at 'Gypsies and nomads'. The label seems to imply that the target of special classes were both the 'Gypsies' (nomadic or not) understood as an ethnic group and the nomads, not necessarily ethnic Roma. In actual fact, it was only Roma and Sinti that were enrolled into them. The class activity was organised around a very flexible timetable adjusted to the needs of students. Already in 1971, when the special classes numbered sixty, spread in particular throughout the north of Italy, the Ministry for Public Education felt the need to reaffirm the transitory nature of such classes, stating that they 'were not meant to be applied to each and every Gypsy child, but only to those demonstrating some particular difficulties, and with the final aim of preparing them for the inclusion into ordinary classes (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione 1971). In 1974 the Ministry stated again that the classes were transitory and exceptional in their nature: inclusion in ordinary classes had to be the general rule. Finally, in 1982, the special classes were definitively suppressed, and to children with special needs and learning difficulties - 'a consequence of their belonging to a different culture' [sic] - were offered the support of an extra teacher operating in the common class environment (Donzello and Karpati 1998).

⁶⁸ The journal in particular hosted different kinds of material, ranging from academic articles, to snapshots on the situation of Roma and Sinti in various cities sent by local correspondents and activists. The authors and contributors were sympathetic with Roma and Sinti. The aim of this analysis is to capture the *zeitgeist* of 'Lacio Drom'.

The root causes of the 'problem'

The traditional influences of the group, such as sex, the handling of death, religion etc make difficult the evolution of the Gypsy and his social development. Such maturation is obstructed also by the condition of marginality and inferiority in which the nomadic people live (Azzolini 1971: 17)

In the 1960s and 1970s, among activists, social workers, and volunteers, the 'Gypsy' is often represented as a child who needs to be helped to become an adult. The causes of this condition are represented as being twofold: primarily, his/her cultural heritage, and secondly as Azzolini, president of Opera Nomadi branch of Trento, points out in the extract above, 'the condition of marginality and inferiority'. By including socio-economic factors, Azzolini aimed to move away from the mainstream dominant discourse on 'nomads' – rooted in the tradition of Lombroso's 'criminals by nature' (Lombroso 1876) – that explained Roma and Sinti's social exclusion exclusively as a result of endogenous causes.

In the same work, Azzolini also supports the building of campsites as a first fundamental step for guiding the 'nomads' on their way to 'development', and emphasises how such an aim has to be taken on board by authorities and cannot be left to the goodwill of volunteers. In his words:

The Gypsy people are in position of underdevelopment and marginality in our society. It is therefore our responsibility to intervene. To act concretely the first step is to set up a campsite, [...] which is the only way to provide community and school education [...]. Such an initiative must come from institutions and cannot be based only on volunteers (Azzolini 1971: 19-22).

The idea of the 'Gypsy' as a child is deeply rooted. As Piasere (1991) has pointed out, in its first twenty years of publication (1965-1984) *Lacio Drom* devoted more than a thousand pages (out of a total of circa five thousand) to the issue of Romani education, and in particular Romani children's education. This is a significant share for a journal which marketed itself as a journal of Romani studies *tout court*. Piasere also notices that almost all of this material takes as a starting point, often implicitly, that Romani parents are incapable of providing an adequate education for their children and, consequently, it is up to non-Romani teachers, social workers,

volunteers, and experts to breach this gap (Piasere 1991: 137-158). Such findings do not come as a surprise. Since their appearance in Europe, the negative stereotyping of Gypsies had as one of its pillars the alleged bad parental habits of this community (see Asseo 2006; Liégeois 1994; Bravi and Sigona 2006). The following extract from a speech given by an eminent nineteenth century Italian expert on 'Gypsy' encapsulates this widespread attitude:

Because Gypsy parents did not receive any sort of schooling or education, they let their offspring grow up wildly, without offering them any notion neither of God nor of morality (Colocci 1971 [1889]: 167).

Colocci attributes gypsies 'puerile life' to an immaturity inherent in the 'gypsy nation' which results from their itinerant lifestyle (1971: 172):

The Gypsy nation is at a stage of childhood. Childhood of the soul that cannot understand anything as enduring or interconnected and that, frightened by everything appearing as fix and established, is ready to accept all the felonies of a puerile life.

Therefore according to Colocci, it is not only Gypsy children who must be educated through school, but also Gypsy adults, who must all be educated about society

The debate on campsites and nomadic lifestyle has to be framed within this overall discourse on Roma and Sinti's underdevelopment. The Catholic ethos plays an important role in defining the approach of sympathetic non-Roma and underpins their work in support of 'Gypsies'.

For Karpati (1969), an eminent activist and scholar who founded the 'Lacio Drom' journal and was among the founders of Opera Nomadi, the distinction between 'nomadic Gypsies' and 'sedentary Gypsies' is the starting point for any analysis of the conditions of Roma and Sinti in Italy, and of any attempt to consider possible solutions. Campsites ('centri sosta'), she argues, respond only to the needs of nomadic Gypsies; for the others, Karpati (and Opera Nomadi) suggests the regeneration of 'ordinary' housing stocks (Karpati 1969). However, while arguing for the camp solution, the activists are also aware of the potential and actual risk of camps: the segregation of Roma and Sinti. According to Azzolini:

Campsites should never become an assistance/charitable institution for Gypsies, but a social institution [...]. If campsites become either *concentration camps* or *ghettos for nomads*, it would be extremely damaging. It is therefore necessary that camps are governed by a set of rules which, little by little (*via via*, in Italian), allow self-government (Azzolini 1971: 21-22, italics in the original).

Azzolini's reference above to self-government is important, an idea which was to appear later on in regional laws. However, the stress on the length of time needed to achieve this goal (*via via*) seems to reinforce what he said earlier about the general belief that Gypsies are not capable of living in the modern world and need therefore to be instructed on how to do it⁶⁹.

This general attitude is also reflected in the approach that volunteers and other stakeholders showed towards nomadism and nomadic lifestyle. On the one side, as the following extract suggests, journeying seemed to be invested with redemptive power, deriving from its being an embodiment of the *true* Romani tradition:

Sedentary Gypsies live in the southern part of Italy. They had to stop because of extreme poverty, which made impossible for them even to own rudimentary vehicles [...]. These Roma live on the margin of towns and villages, in areas which in practice are ghettos, in miserable shacks made of wood, cardboard and garbage. [...] They have lost any contact with the nomadic way of living and its world. Of the Gypsy language, only few and corrupted words survive; of traditions, only some superstitious customs stay alive [Karpati 1969, 81].

On the other side, the *gadje's* (non-Roma) nostalgia for the travelling Gypsies and their customs seemed to clash with the frequent reference in the same body of literature to cultural backwardness and the need for emancipation through schooling⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ For an alternative perspective on modernity and the Roma, see Asseo (1989) who suggests that the Roma produce a 'hegemony of the inside', that is they make of those particular values that allowed them to survive over the centuries their universal values. She refers to the Romani people as 'peuples-résistance' for their ability to escape the hegemonic claim of the majority, without posing a claim for counter-hegemony (see also Piasere 1991; Balibar 2009).

⁷⁰ An interesting parallel can be drawn with the postcolonial literature on the Orient and the Other which emphasises ambiguity and contradictions of constructions of otherness (Bhabha 1994; Said 1978).

A reference to a declaration signed in 1967 by the assembly of the representatives of the Opera Nomadi branches of Torino and Cuneo, the local 'Lacio Drom' teachers, and the local authorities, can help to further clarify the strategic significance that ON attached to schooling. Among the 'urgent and indispensable actions necessary to guarantee the continuity and efficacy of the social promotion of Gypsies' there is as first priority the inclusion of Romani children of primary school and nursery age in full-time school; and then the second priority is the establishment of campsites with hygienic facilities (reported in Lacio Drom 1967, n.4/5/6: 39).

With reference to full-time attendance in school, and the fact that children were to be kept away from their parents and family for most of the day, a local politician from Milan argued that this type of measures was positive for two reasons: 'an initiative such as this favours the integration of Romani children in the local community' and 'takes children away from our streets, which means away from begging, something undeniably not educational' (Vallery 1967: 63).

The aims of a pilot project implemented in Milan in the late 1960s provide some interesting insights into the competing frames of the debate on 'Gypsies' at the time.

Our action is neither discriminatory, nor paternalistic and aims more than anything else to be global [...]. It is a social problem of general interest that we want to solve according to principles and criteria of sociology, psychology, human sciences and no more according to much more archaic, traditional and limited instruments of mere assistance, which often offends human dignity without nurturing the conditions for its full development in society (Vallery 1967: 61)

To coordinate the initiatives associated with the project, a 'committee for social and cultural integration' was established, whose task was to guarantee the overall coherence of the project which Piasere describes as 'a stringent pedagogic, social, medical, and economic set of actions completely centred on the newly built nomad camp' (Piasere 1985: 181).

At this stage, the nomad camp was already a strategic place in which to concentrate the actions aimed at the 'effective integration' of Roma and Sinti. In order to

combat nomads' 'resistance', activists wanted policies which intervened on several fronts: a comprehensive approach, with the involvement of teachers and social workers, but also those supervising Romani workers in workplaces, because it was in the workplace that gypsies' 'resistance to hard work' would be evident (Vallery 1967: 65). The aims of this 'comprehensive approach' is to:

stir up in the Gypsies a sense of belonging to a community in which they can feel safe and therefore become an opportunity for rediscovering their values and traditions and boost their confidence, so that they can relate to non-Roma without any feeling of inferiority' (idem: 69).

To conclude this overview of the sympathetic debate on 'Gypsies' in the 1960s, I would like to emphasise how campsites, despite being embedded in an assimilationist discourse grounded in the idea that the 'Gypsies' are underdeveloped and unfit to cope with modernity and economic transformations, were also a response to the need of itinerant groups for serviced areas where they could stop without the threat of eviction by local police.

The first camps, located in the north of Italy, were built long before the regional laws 'for safeguarding nomadism' were issued by Regional Authorities. To a great extent, they anticipate in their architecture and rationale the 'camps for short stay' or 'transit campsites' described in regional laws. The users of these camps were mainly Italian Sinti living in the north of Italy, working in funfairs or in other itinerant economic niches with seasonal mobility along traditional routes. In the southern part of Italy, housing conditions were more diversified but, with a few exceptions – Karpati (1969) refers to the city centre of Pescara - settled Italian Roma used to live in deprived city centre buildings, or build irregular permanent settlements of huts and shacks at the periphery of towns and villages (Karpati 1975).

Nomad camps in Italy today

The overview of the debate around the birth of nomad camps has highlighted the key historical arguments and rationales behind camps. This section moves the focus to the present, and discusses the spatial dimension of the settlement of Romani communities in Italy, pointing out continuities and discontinuities with the past.

The Romani population in Italy has changed, undergoing some important transformations. The number of foreign Roma has increased substantially in the last two decades; initially with the arrival of the Roma refugees from the Balkans and more recently with the flow of Romanian and Bulgarian Roma, following the enlargement of the EU.

Although official data is not available – Italy does not collect data by ethnic origin and, even if it did, the Romani population is not recognised as an ethnic minority – considering previous estimates, it is probable that the new arrivals reversed the balance between Italian citizens and foreigners, with the majority of the Romani population in Italy now being made up of immigrants (Ministero dell'Interno 2008). However, it must be borne in mind that Romanians and Bulgarians are EU citizens and have entitlements and rights which make them – at least until the enforcement of the decree n.181/2007 on expulsions of EU citizens for reasons of public security (Sigona 2008b, 2009a)⁷¹ – more similar to Italian citizens than to third-country nationals. This has a positive impact on their experience in Italy, and in particular, they do not have to cope with the burden of short-term residence permits, and the insecurity of precarious legal status which is so prominent in the experience of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali.

Despite the fact that most of the new arrivals came to Italy from towns and villages where they were settled and had no experience of a nomadic lifestyle (Piasere 2005; Macura 1999; Liégeois 1994; Matras 1997; Sobotka 2003), the camp (for

⁷¹ Since the last round of the EU enlargement in January 2007, there has been a growing alert in Italy over the risk of what some commentators termed a 'tidal wave' of migrants coming from Romania and Bulgaria to 'invade' Italy. In particular, public and media attention has been focused on the migration of Romanian Roma. Old and deeply-rooted prejudices, wide-spread antiziganism (see ERRC 2000; Sigona and Monasta 2006; Sigona 2009a) and the specific characteristics of Romani migration and livelihood strategies, which make them a visible presence in most Italian cities, have all contributed to create a growing alarm about Roma. Local authorities and national government addressed this alarm by adopting mainly restrictive and *spectacular* measures aimed at 'reassuring' the public and managing public anxiety. On 31 October, the violent murder of an Italian woman in Rome allegedly perpetrated by a Romanian Rom triggered Prodi's government to adopt an emergency decree (n.181/2007) aimed at facilitating the removal of EU citizens from Italy whenever they were deemed to represent a threat to public and national security. Walter Veltroni, mayor of Rome and national leader of the Democratic Party, stated: 'Before Romania EU accession, Rome was the safest capital in the world. We need to repatriate people again; otherwise cities like Rome, Milan and Turin cannot cope with the situation (statement reported in 'La Repubblica', 1 November 2007).

short-term stays) paradigm managed to retain its appeal with local authorities throughout the 1990s.

A key tenet of my approach is that the camp form, with its more or less strict internal regulations, its neat boundaries marking the inside from the outside, its rows of caravans or containers geometrically arranged and visibly numbered, and its central reception offices for guardians and social workers, is not a material form of 'Gypsy culture', as portrayed by the regional laws (see chapter 4), but rather the material form of the Italian public discourse on 'Gypsies'.

A common feature of nomad camps seems to be their being residual, a 'bare form of urbanity' (Boano 2005), built or allowed to be built to contain a group of people perceived as a threat (Rivera 2003), or as human waste (Bauman 2004). Camps are geographies of exclusion, places to which the less desirable groups of a society are relegated (Sibley 1995; 1981), products of exclusionary practices, built on assumptions and 'truths' about exclusion and inclusion which are often implicit in the planning and design.

According to Solimano and Mori, the choice of location for the construction of nomad camps reveals an attitude of contempt, *urban disapproval*, whereby: 'Gypsies must be kept apart from the general population, and the general population does its best to keep distance from them' (Solimano and Mori 2000).

However, for the reasons highlighted in the previous chapter, in particular the absence of national reception policy for asylum seekers and a *laissez-faire* approach to migration, there have been a variety of local responses to the new arrivals – an application of Italian municipalism (Zincone and Caponio 2005; Gaspari 1998; Stacul 2006) to the 'Gypsy problem'. Thus, from the initial ideal type of ethnic holiday camp imagined in the regional laws in defence of nomadism, several types of 'nomads' and 'nomad camps' were produced. Nonetheless, such variety is rarely accompanied by recognition of the different instances and needs expressed by actual Roma and Sinti people (Sigona 2002; Vitale 2008, 2009) and very limited participatory mechanisms are in place, despite camps' codes of conduct and regional laws emphasising the need for some form of self-government for residents.

Yet, although I have emphasised the nature of camps as product of 'our' (i.e. Italian) culture, this must not lead us to underestimate the importance of camps on the everyday lives and cultural and social worlds of the Roma and Sinti as the accounts of camp residents will show later in the thesis. Space is socially constructed and, in turn, constitutive of the social, and of the sense of self of individuals. Umberto Eco's words on the role and semantic of architecture illustrate this relationship:

Architecture connotes an ideology of living and therefore at the same time it persuades and allows for an interpretative reading fit to offer an accretion of information (Eco 1980: 229).

It is therefore important, while problematising the relationship between physical space and discourse, to recognise the impact of camps on inhabitants and on their expectations and ways of interacting with the social and spatial worlds surrounding them. This theme will be further addressed in Chapter 10 through an analysis of the accounts of camp residents which help to locate camps in terms of their particular and dynamic position within webs of social relations that reach far beyond their geographical contours (cf. Massey 1994).

The spread of containers which in the 1990s gradually replaced caravans in official camps marked the transition from the camp for indigenous 'savages' to the camp for the long-term (if not permanent) stay of foreigners, or foreign-like 'nomads', who are perceived to be in need of being controlled and re-educated through massive social intervention (Bravi and Sigona 2006). It was during the 1990s that camps became permanent in their being ideologically transitory (Rahola 2003), a 'frozen transience' (Bauman 2002), in which Romani forced migrants displaced by the war and the political and economic collapse of Yugoslavia were socialised into being 'nomads'.

Beyond nomad camps

The present situation of the Roma and Sinti is significantly different from that of the 1970s, and 'nomad camps' now host a different, and more diverse, population of residents; people that ended up and continue to live in camps for a variety of reasons that often do not have much to do with a nomadic lifestyle.

The hesitant realisation by local authorities of this fundamental point, together with the difficulties involved in governing existing camps that are expensive to build, uphold, manage and control, as well as the fear of social conflict and electoral loss, have all contributed to moving the political debate towards a search for alternative housing solutions which could have less impact on local residents. This in turn responds to the criticism coming from international agencies and anti-discrimination monitoring bodies. Florence and Venice were at the forefront of this movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s. During the 2000s, gradually the issue was taken up by other local authorities and by the central government. The following extract from a public statement by Caritas Ambrosiana (2007), an influential third sector actor in Milan, illustrate the terms of the changing debate:

There is a need to start working, at the institutional level and in society, to find alternative housing solutions to the so-called 'nomad camp'. As a fact, the camp represents a double threat to the place where it is located: it subjects the Roma to a 'differential treatment' and stirs negative reactions, sometimes even of intolerance, in local communities. Moreover, building camps nourishes citizens' prejudice that Roma communities are nomadic and that camps are their ideal habitat. This, in turn, becomes a way for legitimating a policy of precariousness. Instead, the housing issue for the Roma should be addressed on the basis of long term planning, both at the national and local levels (Caritas Ambrosiana 2007: 1)

What we are observing seems to be a shift in the housing paradigm for the Roma, and it was prompted and supported by the advocacy and lobbying of some NGOs, pressure groups and international organisations, that time and again drew public attention to the anomaly of nomad camps in Italy (ERRC 2000; Sigona and Monasta 2006; Marcetti, Mori and Solimano 1993; Brunello 1996; Piasere 1991; Ambrosini and Tosi 2007).

However, this change - often more in rhetoric than in actual practice - is far from being unproblematic and needs to be understood within the broader political discourse and political agenda of the different actors.

The following extracts from speakers from opposite sides of the political spectrum alert us to the ambiguity, and more generally to the different implicit and explicit agendas often embedded in the newly dominant discourse on the 'closing down of

camps'. The first extract is from an interview published by the Italian daily newspaper 'Il manifesto' (6 January 2007) from the then Minister for Welfare Paolo Ferrero⁷² and one of the most prominent figures of the *Rifondazione Comunista* party, and the second extract comes from a statement of the rightwing MEP Roberta Angelilli who has been actively campaigning against the 'shame of nomad camps' that 'spoil the reputation of Italy abroad':

It seems evident that Roma housing is an emerging and central problem. We need to address it in a structural manner and not, as happens often nowadays, with measures which are extemporaneous and often lacking coordination [...] Camps today are ghettos [...] We are searching for new solutions which move us beyond the usual dichotomy 'normalisation/marginalisation' (Paolo Ferrero, *Il manifesto*, 6/1/2007).

In Europe, Italy is known as 'campland'. Settlements of huts and shacks, often without electricity, running water or gas, and out of control, do not exist in any other countries (Roberta Angelilli MEP, press release, 23 January 2008)

The housing paradigm shift has to be understood not as a clear-cut transition, but rather a trend, sometimes happening only discursively, and which involves complex negotiations between actors and institutions.

Therefore, while the centre-left central government seemed, at least in some of its departments, to be lining up behind the idea of moving beyond camps, local authorities have been more cautious since they are the authority directly called upon to implement changes in policy orientation, and to manage the electoral impact of such changes (Sigona 2006b; Vitale 2009). Local authorities find some interested allies in NGOs and cooperatives which have been subcontracted the management of camps over the years.

⁷² In the budget laws of 2007 and 2008, the ministry of Social Solidarity obtained the allocation of public funds for initiatives specifically targeted at the social inclusion of Roma. Among the key aims of these initiatives is to promote: 'the closure of nomad camps which are a phenomenon of social and housing marginality; the fight against the forms of discrimination which obstruct access to housing; and schooling for Roma and Sinti children' (Ministero della Solidarietà Sociale, decree of 12 September 2007 on 'finanziamento di progetti finalizzati a favorire l'inclusione sociale dei migranti e dei loro familiari' [funding projects aimed at promoting the social inclusion of migrants and their families]).

The counter discourse which argues for more camps to be built and for upgrading the old ones, tends no longer to use the culturalist argument, which is dominant in the regional laws, that portrays and produces camps as sort of Native American reserves for Rousseau-like *bons sauvages* (Brunello 1996; Piasere 2005). Instead it relies more on the rhetoric of emergency and temporariness. This argumentative strategy emerged in some cities before others and is shared, to a large extent, between the Left and the Right of the political spectrum with few exceptions. It is centred on the idea that the camps are temporary solutions for addressing a situation of emergency. The cause of the alleged emergency varies: sometimes camps are justified as emergency responses to war-driven displacement or the containment solution for the mass invasion of 'Gypsies'; and more rarely they are presented as a necessary stage in the development of the 'nomads' who, after the experience of the camp, are finally ready to move into 'normal' houses. A common feature of these strategies is that the timing of the transition is always vague, and no clear benchmarks are put forward to assess when the 'emergency' can be considered finished⁷³.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the camp along two dimensions: one genealogical and the other geographical. In the first part, I analysed the discourse on nomad camps in the 1960s and 1970s when it first appeared in the public domain, and showed how, despite a prevalent assimilationist discourse grounded in the idea of the 'Gypsies' being underdeveloped and unfit to cope with modernity and economic transformations, camps were also a response to the specific need of itinerant groups to have serviced areas where they could stop without the threat of eviction by local police.

⁷³ The Prime Minister decree n. 122/2008 which has declared 'the state of emergency in relation to the 'nomad settlements' in the territories of Campania, Lombardia and Lazio' provides a valid example of the discursive construction of 'emergency'. As a justification for the decision, the text mentions the 'extremely critical situations', created by the presence of 'nomads' as well as other 'non-EU illegal residents' living in cities and towns in conditions of extreme marginality and, therefore states, it is 'the extreme precariousness of these settlements' that is causing 'serious social alarm which could lead to severe repercussions in terms of public order and safety of the local population' (Decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri n.122/2008: 1).

The second part has focused upon the period between the 1990s and 2000s, and has discussed the transformation which occurred within the Romani population in Italy, contrasting it with the persistence of the 'nomad camp' paradigm. It is argued that in the transition between these two periods the function of publicly-sponsored nomad camps has shifted. The original policy goal to assimilate Roma and Sinti into society by inducing their settlement was superseded, and camps have become more and more places of managed exclusion (Humeau 1995; Fondazione Michelucci 1997).

Finally, I have discussed the emersion of the 'close down nomad camps' discourse, showing its rationale and the ambiguities that lie behind it.

Romani settlements are built, or allowed to exist, in areas close to prisons, dog pounds and rubbish dumps: land with a very low economic value and a negative symbolic connotation (Revelli 1999; Tabucchi 1999; Brunello 1996; Però 1999, 2007; Karpati 1999). To capture the link between spatial and social marginality, Piasere (1991) calls the Roma 'popoli delle discariche' (people of dump sites) and Sibley talks of them as 'a residual population in a residual space' (1995: 68). Illegal settlements are not much different from the slums of many third world cities (see UN-Habitat 2003; Fondazione Michelucci 2005; Fondazione Michelucci et al. 2006). They are often without running water, services and electricity. Legal settlements are either built from scratch by local authorities, or started off as illegal camps which are later given the 'official stamp'.

Newly-built official camps are often presented as temporary solutions in response to variously defined emergencies, which allow local authorities to build according to different (and lower) standards than is usually the case. Camp plans are generally geometric, with residents allotted a numbered place with a caravan or, sometimes, a container. It is an imposed structure with very little attention given to the importance of social networks and family connections (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 5: Areal view of the 'villaggio di solidarietà' built by the Rome local authority in the remote site of Castel Romano to accommodate Roma previously resident in formal and informal settlements in town (2007).

Both illegal and legal settlements are called 'nomad camps' in common parlance and political discourse, even though in the last few years some local authorities (for example in Naples), conscious of the increasing concern about the use of the 'nomad camp' label, have begun to introduce a series of new definitions. However, this semantic change has only in a few cases been followed by a consistent change of policy and practice (Sigona 2003).

The emergence of what can be termed a housing paradigm shift in the 2000s, with the call for the closure of nomad camps, supported by a broad and diverse range of social and political actors, has to date failed to produce significant results in terms of the quality of housing for Roma and Sinti. There are a few exceptions, and Venice and Florence are two of the most significant, as will be discussed in Part 3. The apparent consensus under the 'close down camps' discourse, which finds supporters both from the Left and the Right, and the extreme actions (i.e. forced evictions) taken by some local authorities to enforce this principle, alert the

observer to the significant differences in interpretation of a single political slogan and the alarming results which can occur.

PART III. THE ROMA AND THE 'GYPSY PROBLEM' IN VENICE AND FLORENCE

Part 3 provides a detailed analysis of the process of institutionalisation of Romani communities in Venice and Florence, and of the social and policy construction of these communities as a social and policy issue. It highlights convergences and divergences between these two cities over a period of fifteen years, from the arrival of the first Yugoslavian Roma, through the Kosovo refugee crisis, to the development of projects for the resettlement in the regions and the closure of 'nomad camps'.

CHAPTER SIX. VENICE

Introduction

Based on the analysis of interview material, grey literature and policy documents, as well as secondary sources, this chapter, like the following one, is divided into three main sections which focus respectively on: public discourse and public policy on Roma before the arrival of the Roma and Ashkali forced migrants in the late 1990s including the appearance of nomad camps; reception policy and practice adopted by local authorities to manage the arrival of Roma and Ashkali forced migrants; and the debate that led to a policy aimed at the closing down of camps and on how this policy were implemented.

Roma and Sinti in Venice before the Kosovo crisis

Prior to the arrival of Yugoslavian Roma, the 'Gypsy' population of Venice consisted of a few hundred long-established Italian Roma and Sinti, based in the municipal camp of via Vallenari which was set up in the late 1970s.

The settlement of Roma from former Yugoslavia in the Venice area began in 1992 with the arrival of a group of sixty people who settled nearby in the abandoned warehouses of an old factory in a desolated area in the borough of Marghera (Venice). The new arrivals soon attracted public attention and, not long after their settlement, a local priest alerted the social services of the municipality, and a social worker was sent to visit the settlement for the first time. Recalling that visit ten years later in an article for the local authority magazine, Rosanna Marcato writes:

When I arrived in Marghera [a borough of Venice], the priest who had contacted my office joined me in the visit to the settlement. The inhabitants had been described to me as displaced people from the war that was going to wipe out Yugoslavia. I was shocked by what I saw: under unsafe and crumbling roofing, in the middle of nowhere, a number of huts made of garbage had appeared; everything was sodden, wet and dirty and little hills made of excrements were all over' (Marcato 2001: 18).

Not long after her report was circulated to members of the local government, the police visited the area and established that, despite their claim of having fled the war in Yugoslavia and therefore being refugees, the residents were instead foreign 'nomads' without papers and therefore in breach of the Law on Immigration (Law n.39/1990), and on this basis ordered their immediate removal from the area (Baldoli et al. 1996). The Roma left, but after a few weeks they were back in Marghera.

The presence of the Roma in town reopened the debate around their status; the dilemma 'Gypsies or refugees?' became a central concern for local authorities but no definitive answer was soon to come. Rather the question will continue to accompany these communities' lives in Venice for the next decade.

The real displaced people, they used to say, arrive with the convoys of the Red Cross, not like these people who arrived clandestinely in small family groups. [...] They were holding Yugoslavian passports but this thing didn't seem to matter to anyone (Marcato 2001: 18).

The solution to the dilemma had very pragmatic implications as it determined what resources were accessible, and what authorities were responsible for the newcomers.

But when an accidental fire burnt down one of the informal Roma settlements, the local authority felt obliged to intervene and provided temporary accommodation for some families who had become homeless. However, distrust and prejudices towards the Roma were still widespread, including amongst people in important institutional and political posts. The decision of the Italian Audit Court (*Corte dei Conti*) to open an inquiry against the local authority, questioning the legal ground on which it had used public funding for providing first-aid support to undocumented people, encountered the support of a large section of the political spectrum.

Also, because of the inquiry, for a few months following the fire the camp issue was in stalemate. On 6 November 1992, a coalition of voluntary organisations, parishes and activists called a public meeting to put pressure on the local government to address what they thought was becoming a humanitarian emergency. Moreover, the organisers pointed out how the proximity of the Yugoslavian border, less than

200 kilometres away, made the arrival of more refugees very likely. The meeting did not succeed in its aims to get the local authority to deal with the inhabitants of camps as people in need of humanitarian assistance. However, it contributed to give more visibility to the supporters of the 'refugees' faction against those supporting the 'Gypsies' one (Rete Antirazzista 1999).

However, when following an inspection of the Public Health Bureau, some cases of tuberculosis were detected in one of the settlements, the local government was forced to take action on the ground of a public health threat, and it decided to temporarily move the residents. An initial attempt was made to move the Yugoslavian Roma to the 'nomad camp' in via Vallenari inhabited by Italian Roma and Sinti. To the authorities, this seemed the 'natural' solution, based on the assumption of some kind of 'Gypsy brotherhood'. This, Marcato (2001:19) argues, 'was the final attempt by the local government to solve the problem as a 'Gypsy problem' tout court'. However, the residents of via Vallenari put up a strong opposition to the decision and the municipality had to come up with an alternative place. The choice fell on the ACI (Automobil Club Italia) parking site of San Giuliano and the transfer was organised on 30 December 1992.

During the following months, the arrivals from Yugoslavia doubled the population in the San Giuliano area, and this persuaded the local authority to find another more spacious location. Recalling that time, Marcato (2001:19) notices how 'from the central government there was no clear response, while rumours from Rome said that because they were Gypsies, therefore bogus refugees, no action was due'. The lack of action from the central government on the specific emergency was also the result of the more general lack of a working asylum system. 'At the same time', Marcato adds, 'no one was telling us how a 'real' refugees should look like' (ibidem).

At the end of April 1993, the local government eventually decided to open a camp in Zelarino. The camp opened on 13 May 1993 under the denomination 'first-aid camp for displaced people from former Yugoslavia'. The emphasis on 'first aid' was meant to stress that the stay in the camp was going to be temporary. However, since the opening of the camp, it was apparent that, despite the declared

intentions, there was neither a clear indication nor a plan of how long this temporary stay was going to be. The camp was located in the north periphery of Mestre (Venice mainland) in what was an isolated and poorly connected area. In order to be entitled to a place in the camp, according to the camp regulation, the applicant had to have arrived in Italy after 1 June 1991⁷⁴.

Opposition to the initiative of the local authority mounted: in particular the right of the 'nomadi' to access the resources and entitlements established by the Law 390/1992 for humanitarian assistance to displaced people from former Yugoslavia was brought into question. The day after the opening of the camp a journalist (Russo, *La Nuova Venezia*, 14 May 1993: 14) ironically wrote on the daily newspaper *La Nuova Venezia*: 'the transfer of those we don't know yet what to call (as they were denied refugee status) started yesterday morning'. The following statement by the then Mayor of Venice, Ugo Bergamo, confirms what seems a general sense of disorientation regarding the 'label' to adopt, and of uncertainty about their legal status. 'The 170 Bosnians were denied the status of refugees. They are not refugees, but mostly nomads. This camp, therefore, is not a refugee camp but a camp for displaced people [*esodati* in Italian]' (Bergamo cited in Marcato 2001: 19). The labelling issue also had some important financial implications. Russo notices that 'to equip the camp costs 200,000,000 ITL [circa 100,000 Euro], this money should be paid back to the Municipality by the State with funding from the Law on Immigration, but', Russo stresses, 'from the section of the law on immigration and not that on refugees, because the '*esodati*', as they have now been labelled in bureaucratic jargon, are not refugees according to the law' (Russo 1993: 14). Moreover, in the same commentary, the journalist shows the paradox of the situation, pointing out that 'having had their asylum claims rejected, at least in theory, the '*esodati*' are not entitled to food aid. However, by law they cannot work either, especially as their ID papers have been withdrawn by the authorities in

⁷⁴ This date was taken from a circular of the Ministry of Interior (1993) aimed to limit the access to humanitarian protection of Yugoslavian passport holders (Bruso 1996)

charge of reassessing their asylum claims. They have no other options than begging which, in turn, happens to be forbidden by law' (ibidem).

The labelling issue was not only a matter of discussion for politicians, journalists and activists. According to Osella (Osella 1997), the president of AIZO (Associazione Italiana Zingari Oggi, one of the largest Italian NGOs supporting Roma and Sinti) while to social workers and activists it was clear that the residents of the Zelarino camp were Roma, at first the residents did not want to declare themselves as such as they felt this would have made their life more difficult. Local residents were also confused by the newcomers and in the early months after the opening of the camp they 'are still unclear on the origins – Gypsies or refugees? - of the inhabitants of Zelarino, and don't know whether to consider the camp an authorised 'nomad camp' managed and funded by the municipality or a camp opened for 'humanitarian reasons' (Baldassa 2003: 50). Recalling his experience in the 1990s, the then deputy Mayor of Venice (in charge of Mestre) (author's interview, 2002) describes in the following extract the difficulties his government encountered in supporting the Roma:

We struggled against the stigmas of deviance and marginality that made the Roma unwelcome to, if not openly contested by, public opinion. For these reasons it was difficult at first to organise an adequate reception for them. What we had to do was to rebuild and reiterate continuously the idea that they were war victims, in the more material and literal meaning of the word, while the prevailing view saw them as illegal migrants and parasites.

Despite the unresolved dilemma of which definition to adopt, the opening of an official site became a magnet for new arrivals and in a few months the population of 'Zelarino' reached 270 units, while another 70-80 people settled informally outside the perimeter of the official camp.

In February 1994, following a request from the newly appointed local government, the Italian Refugee Council carried out a census of the residents of the camps as a first step towards the determination of their legal status and entitlements in accordance with the Law 390/1992.

During that period, the parking site in San Giuliano also continued to grow, receiving new arrivals from Yugoslavia. The local authority tried, with the mediation of the prefect of Venice (the highest representative of the central government in the province), to get other municipalities in the province to host refugee families based in the camp of San Giuliano. 'This hypothesis', the Deputy Mayor (Bettin 1994) wrote in a letter to a local daily, 'is the only feasible one to decongest a situation which is now unsustainable'. The attempt failed. The discontentment with a lack of cooperation of other institutions is debated in local newspapers. A commentator of *La Nuova Venezia* wrote: 'To play ostrich can't be tolerated any longer. Venice can't be left alone to deal with the [displaced people] problem. [...] If they are refugees, the ministry of Interior must take responsibility for them. [...] if they are not, if they are impostors, they must be removed. It is no longer acceptable, this confusion [regarding their legal status]' (Pierobon, *La Nuova Venezia*, 30 May 1994). At the same time, demonstrations, sit-ins and symbolic occupations were organised by radical activists in Venice, with the participation of some inhabitants of the camps, trying to achieve better housing conditions.

In June 1994, health and safety concerns, but even more the rising tensions between activists and Roma, on one side, and local residents in the areas where buildings were squatted, on the other, finally persuaded the local authority led by the recently appointed leftwing mayor Massimo Cacciari to intervene. Having been forced to give up on the hypothesis of an involvement of other municipalities, the decision was taken to build another camp for displaced people. To limit the protests of local residents, alerted by the possibility of having the 'Gypsies' in their backyard, the local government decided to locate the new camp in San Giuliano. While the building of the new camp was carried out, the Roma were temporary transferred to the ACI parking site previously used for the same purpose. In September of 1994, when eventually the Roma were transferred to the new camps, the residents of 'San Giuliano' were 219, while Zelarino hosted 269 people.

Figure 6: Location of San Giuliano and Zelarino campsites, Venice.

The everyday management of the camps was assigned to a cooperative whose employees were in charge of the 24 hour guardianship of the camps, and the assessment and filtering, of residents' needs and claims. Strategic planning and overall coordination of measures aimed at the social integration of residents were assigned to the office for Immigrants and Nomads (where the 'nomads' were the Roma from Yugoslavia) within the department for Social Security of Venice City Council.

In the early 1990s, the settlements in San Giuliano hosted many relatives and friends of the residents of Zelarino. They were located on the land of a disused garbage dump site. However, as Baldoli et al. (1996: 187) pointed out, 'the area offers to residents some *advantages* as, despite being fairly hidden, it is nearby an access to the main ring road of Mestre and to a petrol station where it is possible to get water'. When the residents are transferred to the new official camp in the same area the old makeshift huts, arranged according to family and friendship network, were replaced by caravans provided by the local authority, rigidly arranged along parallel lines. Imposing a bureaucratic rationality to the organisation of the space caused frequent tensions among residents, who were divided into two main groups: a majority of Kosovo Roma and the rest from Serbia (Baldoli et al. 1996: 191). The tensions, exacerbated by new arrivals, eventually brought to the transfer of the Serbian minority to the camp of Zelarino.

The arrival of Roma and Ashkali refugees from Kosovo in the late 1990s

In the second half of the 1990s, when the situation in the former Yugoslavia seemed briefly to be getting more stable, the municipality attempted to stimulate, with financial incentives,⁷⁵ the voluntary return of Roma to their country of origin. This strategy was also motivated by the dramatic cuts in state funding which was previously used to cover the considerable costs of camps. The central government in fact had cut the funding for the implementation of the Law n. 390/1992 in support of displaced people from the former Yugoslavia. Venice local authority therefore had to develop an alternative and financially-sustainable strategy for the Roma. The 'voluntary return' programme was meant to be part of this strategy, but it failed, and most of the few people who had accepted the reward for leaving the camp came back to the camp clandestinely not long after (Carradori 2001). The local authority then took the decision to use funding from its own budget to keep the two camps running, covering in particular the costs of 'electricity, gas and water supplies, camp management and guardianship and ordinary and extraordinary maintenance of structures' (Carrara 2001: 16), while starting to work on a medium to long term strategy for the camps' residents. The decision to use local authority internal funding for supporting Roma refugees was taken in 1997 during the electoral campaign. Other local governments in Italy facing the same funding problem responded instead by cutting their services and leaving people on the street.

According to the deputy Mayor Bettin (author's interview, 2002), Venice should be taken as a positive example by other left and left-to-centre local authorities for its capacity to implement innovative and progressive policy in support of migrants and refugees, and he adds:

We explained our strategy during the electoral campaign and won the elections. This

⁷⁵ The municipality offered 1,000,000 ITL (500 €) for each adult and 500,000 ITL (250 €) for each minor who accepted to leave the camp and to sign a statement in which they committed themselves to never return to Venice.

proves that when one puts forward a decision of this kind, of course in the context of a successful experience of government, and explains to the public the general positive outcomes which derives from having a few hundred people living not on the street but in slightly better conditions and with their rights recognised, the public can appreciate the advantages for the local community in general.

This important passage in the strategy of the municipality towards the Roma occurred whilst the situation in Kosovo was getting more acute, causing more and more Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians to leave their houses and flee abroad. In Venice, the arrivals of RAE increased significantly from June 1999, peaking in the summer-autumn of 1999, when the San Giuliano camp reached a population of over 300, well beyond its maximum capacity of 180 inhabitants. Many newcomers were relatives of the residents of the camp and, in absence of other suitable housing solutions, found shelter in the already overcrowded caravans and huts of San Giuliano. The following extract from an interview with the deputy Mayor of Venice published in the daily newspaper *Gazzettino* (15 September 1999) shows the situation from the perspective of local authorities:

In our country, starting with the decisions taken by the central government the rule is disorganisation and lack of efficacy. [The central government's approach] oscillates between draconian measures, certainly wrong, and an attitude of generalised laxity, which has even worst effects. Thus local authorities are forced to take upon themselves tasks which are not their own. Just like Venice that in the last five years is trying to bring order to chaos.

The local government found itself once again dealing with an emergency with very limited resources. Frequent episodes of violence against other residents and social workers visiting the premises alerted the municipality. On several occasions, the local government invited the new arrivals to leave the camp voluntarily, but with no success. During the summer, a transfer to a reception centre in Crotona, 1100 Km away, was proposed to 80 newcomers, but the proposal encountered harsh opposition. At that point, the so-called *linea dura* [tough approach] prevailed, and the local government issued expulsion orders to 80 'illegal' residents and successively proceeded with their forced eviction.

However, most people reappeared in San Giuliano a few days after the forced eviction. According to a spokesperson of the Rete Antirazzista interviewed during fieldwork in Venice:

They should have addressed the situation earlier to avoid the current situation. Four out of seven Roma adults work at Fincantieri [a large factory based in Venice], how can the municipality ask them to stay here while their family is sent to Crotona? [...] The authorised camps were born to provide first aid to refugees, they were meant to last 6 months, and instead they have been open for years. It is unacceptable for the local government to use now the health threat to justify the forced eviction of 80 people, when the situation in the camp is unacceptable also for the other residents (author's interview, 2006).

The term 'illegal' used on several occasions by the representatives of the local authority and amplified by local media in relation to the forced evictions of 80 Kosovo Roma who arrived in Venice during the summer 1999 (Rete Antirazzista 1999) deserves some attention. The use was openly opposed by the Rete Antirazzista (2000), who noticed that the local authority, in order to justify its decision to expel newcomers, engaged in an intense media campaign aimed at framing the latest arrivals as 'criminals' and 'illegal migrants'.

The connotation of the new arrivals as 'illegal' is not only incorrect, as the large majority of them were legally resident in Italy, holding temporary leaves to remain on humanitarian grounds, but, I would argue, is also revelatory of a specific way of framing the rights and entitlements of migrants and refugees whereas these are not the result of a general and binding legal framework, but the product of municipality-based policy and practice and local political dialectics⁷⁶. As a matter of fact, the only 'illegality' committed by these people is unauthorised residency according to what is established in the camp regulation, a minor offence compared to the rights to protection of refugees and displaced people.

⁷⁶ Zincone (1994) has convincingly characterised the approach of local authorities to migrants as an expression of 'localism of rights'. To describe the same phenomenon Stacul (2006) has more recently proposed to use the term 'neo-localism'.

No more camps for Roma

Closing down the camps: translating an idea into policy

'Ti sbatto fuori però, se vuoi, ti accompagno in questo percorso'⁷⁷

The new arrival of displaced people from Kosovo in 1999 caused the worsening of the living conditions in the San Giuliano camp. Tensions between residents and social workers, protests and symbolic occupations organised by camp residents and activists in Venice and Mestre, the pressure of the media and the rising hostility of public opinion, finally made the local government realise that it was time for a change of strategy. The new strategy was aimed 'through a multiplicity of actions and initiatives, at the gradual closure of the camps, guaranteeing in the meantime the same quality of assistance to residents as in the previous years'⁷⁸ (Carrara 2001: 17).

There is an understanding at this point that camps, which were meant to provide temporary accommodation and assistance to new arrivals, had become permanent institutions for residents and that 'limiting public intervention to make camps more liveable places, although reasonable and, to some extent, necessary, ran the risk of becoming an ineffective strategy to solve long term problems, encouraging instead the procrastination of the conditions of precariousness and emergency' (Fagnoni 2000a: 3). For an activist and employee of Caracol,

After having fought for having the camps, we started to work for their closure. Our idea was to create 'paths' towards a full citizenship. To live under assistance can be

⁷⁷ Excerpt from the interview to a social worker where she sums up the essence of the Venetian local authority's intervention: 'I throw you out [of the camp] but, if you wish, I can assist you in this process'

⁷⁸ It is worth noticing that, especially in more recent statements (see Cacciari 2008; Marcato 2005: 1), the decision to close down the camps in Venice is presented by key institutional actors as in continuity with the previous policy, as a 'natural' development rather than as a result of political confrontation and dialectics as it appears by a close reading of the press (Rete Antirazzista 1999) and from less recent statements by some of the same actors. The transition from one narrative to the other can be detected in the following extract from Marcato where the new 'evolutionary' discourse is still temperate by the 'great complexity' of events that led to develop and implement the *Mila* project for the closure of the camps. The closure of the San Giuliano camp in 2003, Marcato (2005:1) argues, is 'the culmination of a 10 years long work. During this period, historical, political, legislative and social events on the one side, and personal circumstances of each of the actors involved intermingled producing, through great complexity, solutions for the integration of the Roma which take into account the peculiarities of this group and a courageous use of [public] resources'.

good at the beginning, but, after a while, becomes detrimental and creates dependency' (author's interview, 2004).

However, my fieldwork has also highlighted other motivations beyond the decision to close the camps, not least the pending plans for commercial redevelopment of the San Giuliano area, and the concern over the electoral impact of the camps on the ruling coalition. In the words of a social worker,

Local residents were unhappy with the situation. The camps had very high political and management costs. The image of the politicians then in government was often challenged because of the camps. Finding as a solution the closure of the camps thus served several purposes (author's interview, 2005).

In December 1999, the local government appointed a social cooperative [*cooperativa sociale*] named *Caracol*, to 'develop the conditions for the closure of the camps through assisted voluntary return or local integration of the Romani families' (Fagnoni 2000a). Under the strategic direction of the municipal office for Immigrants and Nomads, the role of the cooperative was to liaise on an everyday basis with families, authorities and other stakeholders, identify individualised sustainable strategies for each Roma family, and, overall, set up the ground and 'create the material conditions that would allow the refugees, who by now have been living in Venice for six years, to become full Venetian citizens, aware of their rights and duties' (idem: 2).

Since the interim report on the implementation of the first phase of the project (Mila 1), *Caracol* emphasises how assisted voluntary return is not at the top of their list of solutions. Rather the aim of the first stage of the project is to assess the scope for reducing the number of residents in the camps and the resources needed for this purpose, to develop a strategy for the closure of at least one of the camps, and for transforming the second one into an asylum reception centre. Finally, to assess the scope for assisted voluntary return ensuring that return projects were not in any way imposed on residents but are 'in accordance with residents, without neither coercion nor traumas' (ibidem). The concept is reiterated in the final report of Mila 1 (Fagnoni 2000b: 3), 'voluntary return cannot in any way represent the main

instrument or one of the main instruments to reach the closure of the camps in the current political circumstances’.

Recalling the beginning of Mila 1, the then City Councillor for Social Affairs (author’s interview, 2002) stated,

First of all we wanted to verify, because of the termination of the humanitarian protection, the actual possibility of return of these people to their villages. We soon realised that very often this was impossible; nevertheless we left the door open for those willing to return, for all the others, we searched for solutions which would meet the preference of each of the families.

When the municipality started to work towards the closure of the camps, the demographic situation in the settlements was the following: in San Giuliano there were 192 ‘regular’ residents, of whom 176 had leave to remain, 16 undocumented, and 57 so-called ‘tolerated’ residents without authorisation to live in the camps. Out of 26 families, only six had no source of regular income. In the Zelarino camp, there were 100 official residents, of whom 74 had leave to remain and 26 without, and 20 ‘tolerated’ residents, mainly families who in the past had benefited from the municipality incentives for voluntary return but had returned to the camp not long after. The employment situation was worse than in the other camp, with only ten people regularly working (Fagnoni 2000b).

During the implementation of the project, the situation in Kosovo became a cause of concern for the local authority, as the continuous inflow of Roma refugees fleeing Kosovo was perceived as a threat to the success of the Mila project. As a response, the local authority tried to limit the new arrivals despite the recognition of the ongoing humanitarian emergency in Kosovo. Caracol captures the issue in one of its reports (Fagnoni 2000b:3):

We believe that the key element for the success of the plan is a clear and neat separation between the issue of long-established displaced people and new arrivals. Letting the two issues mix up will inevitably cause paralysis, incurring into danger of dispersing public human and economic resources without being able to ensure adequate reception neither to old nor to new refugees.

The initial project lasted six months, at the end of which the cooperative presented an action plan for the implementation of the local authority's objectives.

In the interim report of Mila 1, Caracol points out how residents of both camps are paying the consequences of the events happening in their country of origin, and how their life-chances are affected by the recent conflict in Kosovo and what remains of the Yugoslavian Federation (Serbia) (Fagnoni 2000a). Nevertheless, the impact of the war on the lives of the two groups living in the two camps seems to be different. In fact, Caracol notices, 'what is evident in the camp of San Giuliano, and it is backed by the stories told by the refugees, is that what happened in Kosovo precludes any chance of refugees' return to their homeland as their houses were destroyed' (Fagnoni 2000a: 4). The impossibility of return, Caracol argues, has pushed residents to search for a more stable condition in exile, as the large number of people in regular employment seems to demonstrate. On the basis of this argument, Caracol suggests to the local authority the development of a communication strategy to give 'the highest visibility to the post-war reality of Kosovo, through direct documentation and testimonies, in order to strengthen in the public opinion and the other institutions involved the argument in support of the closure of the camps' (ibidem).

In the Zelarino camp, mainly inhabited by Roma originally from Serbia arriving in Italy in the early 1990s, the long permanence in the camp seems to have produced, according to non-Romani interviewees, a dependency syndrome in the residents, or to put it in Caracol's terms (Fagnoni 2000a: 7), 'the conviction that it is possible to maintain the current situation of assistance in the camp for an indeterminate time (or at least for a long time), continuing in the meantime with various 'trade activities' without any form of regular employment or license'. In order to address such a 'gangrening' situation, Caracol sees as priority working with residents and building awareness of the impact of the closure of the camp on their legal status and the need therefore to search for regular employment as a requirement for renewing residence permits. But, first of all, Caracol reckons, it is up to the local government to convince residents that the closure of the camp is inevitable, imminent and non-negotiable.

In October 2000, following a positive evaluation of the initial stage of the project, the city council entrusts the local government to appoint Caracol to continue the work laid down in Mila 1. In twelve months the Mila 2's task of closing down the Zelarino camp was accomplished. On 31 October 2001, in front of a delegation of high representatives of the local government – including the Mayor, the pro Mayor and the councillor for Social Affairs - the Zelarino camp is definitively closed. In a statement to the press, the Mayor celebrates the achievement praising Venice because it 'has demonstrated once again her civilisation, her capacity to welcome strangers and also her tolerance' (Costa in *Il Gazzettino*, 1 November 2001).

The closure of the San Giuliano camp, the third and final stage of the Mila project (Mila 3), started at the end of March 2002. The plan was to close down the camp in a year, but at the beginning of February 2003 the camp was burnt down in an accidental fire and the remaining 75 residents were temporary relocated in an abandoned school building.

Institutional arrangements and the implementation of the strategy: dispersal, the Italian way.

In taking the decision to close the camps, the local authority of Venice also decided to actively support camp residents in the search for alternative accommodation, and entrusted the social cooperative Caracol with three key tasks: 1) to identify, on a family by family basis, the housing options most suitable to the needs and resources of the Roma; 2) to assist the relocation of families with a range of activities of support, accompaniment and mediation between them and the various state and non-state agencies and individuals involved (e.g. house owners, local authorities' offices in the areas of dispersal and banks); and 3) to allocate to families, willing to enter the housing market or to return to their country of origin, economic incentives according to a set of criteria which had been negotiated between the local government and Caracol. The extent of Caracol's involvement in developing the objectives and terms of reference of the Mila project and its

autonomy in managing and allocating public resources is remarkable but not uncommon in Italy (see Marcon 2004), especially considering the close political relation between key members of the local government and Caracol⁷⁹, which is well illustrated in the following excerpts from my interview with the then City Councillor for Social Affairs:

Venice local government would not be able to develop this type of actions without the grass-root diplomacy [of groups like CSOA Rivolta] which has laid down the foundations with their mobilisation starting from the war in former Yugoslavia (author's interview, 2002).

He further illustrates this point stating:

I believe that there is no way to put forward policy such as the closure of the camps without having previously ploughed the terrain through conflict. The closure of the camps could never be achieved if in Venice there had been no open conflict over the war, NATO's intervention in Kosovo, and the issue of the protection of refugees from former Yugoslavia (author's interview, 2002).

As a matter of fact, the cooperative became an extension – not just an implementing partner - of the local government on this issue. With the strong political endorsement of a part of the local government, it operated in the camps in close collaboration with the Office for Immigrants and Nomads, but with a significant degree of autonomy using its non-institutional nature to streamline, and sometimes bypass, what an interviewee called 'time-consuming processes and negotiations' (author's interview, 2005). The relationship with the different components of the local government and the process of definition of the strategy to close down the camps are clarified in the following excerpts from my interviews with the cooperative in charge for the implementation of Mila and a senior social worker:

We had frequent meetings and discussions with the local authority. Together we identified the aims and objectives of our work and met up to assess developments

⁷⁹ Caracol was born out of the 'Centro Sociale Occupato Autogestito [CSOA] Rivolta', a legally constituted agency capable to receive public funding

and results along the way. However in the local authority, apart from those we knew, we met a strong resistance. We took advantage of the presence of Bettin [then pro Mayor], always keen on this issue, and later of Zanella and Caccia [respectively Councillors for Housing and Social Affairs]. With the others, the only argument they were listening to was the economic one. We had to explain time and again that rather than spending every year millions of Euro to maintain and manage the camps, with our project, they would have cut the costs once and for all (author's interview with Caracol, 2005).

The social worker, instead, stresses how the development of the strategy was a participatory process with the involvement and contribution of several actors⁸⁰. She says:

I believe this project is the result also of the contribution of those who were active in the camps. In the past, there was a vibrant debate around this issue, with several voices: groups of volunteers, associations, priests and CSOAs (*centri sociali occupati autogestiti*) all on different positions, all of them pushing for their side. This project was born as an attempt to bridge the gap between us and them, to find a compatible solution for everyone. I think that this effort, at least in part, succeeded and now we have better relations with CSOAs (author's interview with a social worker, 2005).

She also offers her perspective on how the collaboration with the cooperative worked out:

We worked well together and supported each other in our different roles. So, in situations when we gave families an ultimatum – 'either you do what we say or you are out' - we were also able to assist them in several ways: to find a house, to adjust to the new places, to deal with house owners, banks and agencies (idem).

Based on the initial scoping studies (Progetto Mila 1), in which the cooperative mapped the housing resources available on the Venetian territory and the needs of the Roma families, Caracol focused on three main potential solutions: a) the allocation of public houses and apartments to Roma families fulfilling the local

⁸⁰ However, it is remarkable the absence of Roma people in the list, but as I learned during the fieldwork, also in the process itself.

authority criteria for the main housing list, or that for families with special needs; b) buying or renting houses on the private market; and c) assisting return to former Yugoslavia.

The following table illustrates the different solutions and the number of families associated with each of them.

Figure 7: Summary table of the Mila Project

Typology of Intervention	Number of families	Number of People
Economic Incentives for Voluntary Repatriation	14	42
Facilitate Access to Public Housing*	18	115
Support for Buying or Renting Houses	50	263
Total	82	420
*Four families were assigned houses through the standard allocation procedure and the rest had a temporary allocation as families with 'special needs'.		
Based on Boetto 2004		

A closer look at the data reported in the table shows a less positive reality. Regarding voluntary repatriation, for example, during the fieldwork it emerged that of the forty-two Roma individuals who benefitted from the economic incentives to repatriation, no one actually repatriated. As an interviewee put it:

Of those who had signed up for the economic incentives for repatriation, no one moved back to Serbia. Some of them went home for a month but then returned. No Kosovo Roma signed up.

However, an important caveat of the agreement between the Roma willing to repatriate and the Venetian local authority was that, by accepting the economic contribution of the local authority, the Roma applicants had to promise not to seek further assistance from Venice local authority. The routine formula used in the statements they were asked to sign was:

I hereby declare to leave definitively and irrevocably the camp of XXXX, considering terminated in all regards my request of assistance to the Municipality of Venice⁸¹.

⁸¹ From the template prepared by Caracol for Roma requesting the economic support of the local authority.

Interestingly, it was a Caracol case worker who pointed out to me that legally such a statement is not binding and if a 'voluntarily returned' Roma family was coming back to Venice and happened to fulfil the criteria for accessing public housing there was no way the local authority could prevent them from applying. This solution, my interviewee added, became a 'last resort' adopted by the cooperative for those families who for various reasons were deemed 'not capable to integrate' or capable to sustain the costs of a house, in her words:

I used to say to them: 'put your hand on your heart, it is eight years that you have everything paid for you here; it's true the camp is disgusting, but if you are unhappy, you can work hard and get a house as everyone else or get a bit of money [she is referring to the economic incentives] and do whatever you like somewhere else.

As for facilitating access to public housing, Caracol encountered several obstacles, some structural and macro in nature, others micro-political and local. In general, access to public housing in Italy is extremely competitive due to high social housing demand and limited availability (CRESME 2005), as a result of the fact that housing has always remained on the margins of social policies, 'not just financially, but also symbolically' (Doherty et al. 2004: 14, see also Tosi 2000, Marcetti and Solimano 1998). The issue is addressed through a plethora of micro-distributive measures, rather than by long term policies with clear and long term objectives⁸². Migrant families and individuals are particularly affected by this situation, and frequently experience residential and housing segregation (Tosi 2000, 2004; Palidda 1998; Marcetti and Solimano 1998; OSIV 2005). However, as Arbaci notices (2008: 589), 'the complexity of ethnic housing hardship and segregation is often de-problematized and misleadingly attributed solely to market mechanisms or inevitable polarisation dynamics'.

Of the eighteen families that were relocated to public housing, only five did so through the ordinary procedure. For the rest, Caracol managed to negotiate with

⁸² In Italy public initiatives to encourage home ownership have not been accompanied, apart from a few exceptions, by strong social housing building programmes. As Doherty et al (2004: 14) point out, 'while the quantity of private rented accommodation is similar to that in France for example, at around 20%, public sector housing stock (which in France is at around 18%) stands at around 5%'.

the local government and the Venetian Public Housing Authority (Azienda Territoriale per l'Edilizia Residenziale - ATER) a dedicated, although temporary, channel. Informants pointed out how the relocation in public housing was the preferred solution for most families - both economically and location-wise - but in the local government, not everyone was pleased by the prospect of 'too many' Roma moving into ATER apartments, and Caracol and its political counterparts in the local government had to work hard to persuade the other parties to support the initiative. A corollary to this situation was that Caracol had to identify among the Roma families fulfilling the criteria of law, those 'less problematic' and 'more integrable' into the local community, in order to reassure the local government of the positive impact of the transfer.

Assisting Roma to buy or rent on the housing market became the most feasible solution for relocating the residents of the camps. The search for affordable properties suitable for Roma families covered an area well beyond the borders of the municipality of Venice (where properties were outside the reach of the buyers) covering the provincial territory of Venice, Padua and Rovigo in Veneto and Ferrara in Emilia Romagna (see map below).

Very soon, Caracol realised that rent was not really an option because 'no one wanted to rent a house to a Rom' (author's interview with a caseworker, 2006), and the focus moved to buying. The assistance offered by Caracol took different forms: searching for properties compatible with the needs and budget of the families, arranging visits for the families and mediating with estate agencies, accompanying the prospective buyers to see the properties, reassuring agencies and property owners concerned with the reliability of the buyers, allocating grants to the families according to the number of family members and the overall family income, and help Roma families get a mortgage by reassuring banks of their solvability using the backing of the municipality of Venice. Regarding this final task, as a Caracol case worker pointed out (author's interview, 2005):

We didn't encounter any problem with mortgages. Quite the opposite, banks were pleased with getting many new clients. Word of mouth helped. [...] Of course, we didn't go to the Deutch Bank, where if you are late with payment of ten days they

give you hard time!

Figure 8 Map of the Dispersal in Venice and surroundings

By operating in the 'private market' through Caracol, the local authority could bypass the stage of endless negotiations with other municipal authorities – a major advantage considering the several failed attempts made in the past. The 'private market' route, with local authority financial and political backing up, proved effective in finding the houses for families with adequate economic resources.

However, in some locations, problems started immediately after the arrival of the Romani families. In the Mila final report, the coordinator of Mila states:

The difficulties of settlement encountered in the first months only in a few cases

have been brilliantly overcome: in most cases, it took a long time to deal with them, and some situations, if not dealt with continuity, risked ending up in cases of extreme marginality (Boetto 2004: 5).

Formal and informal interviews carried out during the fieldwork have highlighted three main problematic aspects in the Venetian 'dispersal' programme.

Firstly, the lack of preparation of receiving localities as arrivals, often in fairly remote towns and villages, were managed discreetly without informing the municipalities. To avoid opposition before arrival, this strategy ended up stirring negative reactions – sometimes even violent - by residents immediately after. For Marcato, the previous experience of failed collaboration with other municipalities taught the local authority a lesson: 'never talk to anyone before it is too late. As a free citizen, I can buy a house wherever I want. It is as simple as this'. This strategy, however, while initially effective, contributed to steering opposition among local communities. A social worker (author's interview, 2006) in Rovigo recalls how 'out of the blue, new Roma families started to appear in town' causing 'a real trauma to local authorities' that didn't know how to respond to the newcomers.

Secondly, the limited availability, in towns and villages which often had no previous presence of Romani families, of human and financial resources to support families with specific needs (i.e. schooling, welfare provisions, access to employment, legal advice) and who, in most cases, were coming from protracted periods of assistance in Venetian camps. For a social worker in a dispersal area (author's interview, 2006),

It was hard to work in such conditions. In Venice, they have been working with the Roma since the late 1980s. This means that social services have a history, instead, here it was very hard and still is not easy to manage integration. This territory is poor, with limited resources'.

After the initial 'trauma', some municipalities got together and created a solidarity fund to respond to the new reality. Interestingly, the fund was not meant only for assistance to dispersed Roma but also to asylum seekers and refugees who had arrived in the area in small numbers as part of the first coordinated effort to create an asylum reception system in Italy and were later left to local authorities when the

central government drastically cut the funding for supporting the programme⁸³ (cf. chapter 4).

Finally, the poor quality and remote locations of the properties and the conditions of purchase put a heavy burden on many Romani families, who had to cope also with precarious employment and legal status. While I will explore in greater detail the relationship between housing, employment and legal status in the comparative section; here I want to report some views regarding the location and quality of accommodation from different perspectives. The first quote illustrates the view of an activist opposed since the beginning to the dispersal project. In the second and third quotes, a social worker of the Venice City Council and an activist sympathetic to the dispersal project also express concerns about the quality of accommodation:

They ended up in non-places. Even if their address says Portogruaro they live in the dumpiest and unhealthiest areas outside town. It is the same in Cavarzere. They are not in town, but in the countryside outside town which frankly is dreadful (author's interview, 2005).

Some of the houses they bought are really awful, even without sewage. The families had to deal with really difficult situations (author's interview, 2006).

With the resources available to them, the only properties they could buy were pig-houses. Then, some got pig houses which were somehow habitable, others bought properties absolutely uninhabitable (author's interview, 2005).

Those in charge of the implementation of the dispersal project expressed, predictably, more positive views on location and quality of accommodation, within the limitation of the resources available. Moreover, as an activist in Venice pointed out, after dispersal, the large majority of the Roma families she was still in contact with were those who ended up in the most problematic situations and needed help. The others, instead, became difficult to reach and, in many ways, their circumstances were invisible to social services.

⁸³ For a discussion of the Piano Nazionale Asilo (PNA) [National Asylum Plan], see Chapter 4.

Conclusion

In spring 2008, the camp of via Vallenari in Venice, inhabited by forty Italian Sinti and Roma families, was at the centre of a violent political confrontation when the local authority's plan for a new and better serviced area to replace the existing camp was disclosed. The protest led by the Northern League, against the use of public funding for the 'nomads', did not stop the project. This episode is not directly relevant for my research as it involves Italian Roma and Sinti, however, I would like to report here a statement given by the Mayor of Venice, Massimo Cacciari⁸⁴, at the height of the confrontation, as it bears some interest for my argument:

Once again it must be made clear that: a) the new camp solves the problems caused by the proximity of the current camp [...] to nearby apartment blocks and at the same time it is a dignifying solution for its future inhabitants; b) the new camp is only hundred meters away from the current one and it is built to accommodate 40 Sinti families who have been Venetian citizens for a long time. *Because of this*, the new camp has nothing to do either with a 'nomad camp', or with the presence of illegal migrants. As a matter of fact, the Sinti living in the camp are in regular jobs and do not benefit from any forms of public assistance, in particular of job benefits; c) our policy is to promote integration and at the same time to combat crime and any behaviours against law; d) to limit local authority intervention to the fight of crime or to 'forced integration' can only foster conflicts and social tensions.

Finally, the Mayor of Venice draws a comparison with the past policy of the Municipality towards the 'real' nomad camps:

Those who are attacking the current initiative of the local authority should be well aware that in the 1990s on the Venice mainland there were the *real* 'nomad camps' of San Giuliano and Zelarino, with a population of 7-800 residents [...]. The local authority, practically alone and without external help, through control, prevention and integration, but also, when necessary, evictions, manage to eliminate these two camps without any significant tensions or conflicts [italic added] (Cacciari, press

⁸⁴ Massimo Cacciari has been Mayor of Venice since 2005. He already occupied this position between 1993 and 2000. During his first mandate, he was supported by a leftwing coalition including the Green Party and the Communist Party. The current ruling centre-left coalition has a more moderate political programme.

release, 17 May 2008⁸⁵).

There are several aspects of this statement which bear some interests for my work, and I will discuss them briefly.

First of all, the emphasis on what is and what is not a 'real' nomad camp is noteworthy. It shows the importance of labelling, as much as of how important the frame in which the label is employed, and how labels are negotiable and subject to political dialectics and contestation. On one level, the Mayor's use of the term 'nomad camp' is incorrect, as this term should be used to refer to serviced areas for itinerant families (as discussed in chapter 5), and not to camps such as Zelarino and San Giuliano where the Municipality housed sedentary Roma refugees and migrants. However, the use of 'nomad camps' in a statement like the one reported above must be seen in its relation to the other elements of the discourse and also in relation to the target audience of the statement. The Mayor is framing his response to address the criticism of the local right wing opposition – which in turn was echoing the terms of discourse of the national government fight against 'illegal migrants and Gypsies' (see Sigona 2008; ERRC et al. 2008). This also explains the emphasis on security and control, however balanced with integration. The bullet pointed structure of the statement also conveys an idea of the Mayor wanting to dismantle point by point the argument of the opposition.

The second consideration I want to make concerns the actual contents of the points listed in Cacciari's statement. Point a) encompasses two elements: a reassurance to local residents (i.e. the new camp will move the Sinti away from their apartments); but also a reassurance to the Sinti, and to the leftwing side of his voters, regarding the good housing standards of the new camp. Point b) stresses that, despite moving the camp away from its previous location, it does it not so much to locate them near other apartment blocks - thus limiting the risk of enlarging potential opposition to the plan; but it also recalls the fact that the Sinti living in via Vallenari are

⁸⁵ Press release: <http://www.comune.venezia.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/17306>

Venetian citizens. Interestingly, the *Venetian*-ness is used as evidence of the fact that the camp of via Vallenari cannot be a nomad camp. Moreover, he adds, despite what they say and what you may think, these people are not on benefits, but have regular jobs. Nonetheless, to avoid any accusation of being 'soft touch', in points d) and e) he recurs to the 'security and control' argument and, finally, he reassures everyone that, despite the new camp, he is still fighting crime and, for this purpose, integration is a better strategy than policing alone.

The third and final point I want to make regarding Cacciari's statement, concerns the reference he makes to the 'real nomad camps' of Zelarino and San Giuliano. First of all, it must be noticed how, in contrast to the past, instead of 'refugee camps' he is now referring to Zelarino and San Giuliano as 'nomad camps' inhabited by 'nomads'. As I have pointed out in this chapter, Cacciari and his government avoided the use of the term 'nomad camps' during the 1990s and early 2000s, preferring to refer to the inhabitants of the camps as refugees or displaced people, and to the camps as 'first aid camps for displaced people'. This change of labels is not fortuitous. As noted earlier, Venetian authorities have always been aware of the power of labels and their exhortative value. What we see here, I would argue, is a shift in the overall discursive frame around migrants, refugees and 'nomads', happening primarily at the national level but with powerful echoes also locally, in which the Mayor is somehow 'forced' to buy into, however trying to defend and legitimate his current initiatives in the light of the 'success' of the previous ones.

In this chapter, I have analysed discourse, policy, and practice towards Romani (forced) migrants in Venice over a period of fifteen years. I have shown how strategic (re)labelling of Roma has occurred at different times over the period in exam and involved a variety of social actors and agendas. I have also emphasised the interplay between different institutions and the saliency of labels in defining duties and responsibilities of the institutional actors, as well as the fate of the labelled subjects.

CHAPTER SEVEN. FLORENCE

Introduction

The construction of the first 'campo nomadi' in 1987 marks the beginning of the institutionalisation of the 'Gypsy problem' in Florence, by which I refer to the process of developing and implementing institutional initiatives aimed at governing the relationship between the Roma and other local residents. The key institutional players are the local authority, the borough councils (*Quartieri*), the regional authority, and the local prefecture as a representative of the central government.

The chapter will broadly replicate the threefold structure of the previous chapter. After discussing the 'discovery' of the Roma and the first attempts to govern this population at the local level, it investigates the responses to the arrival of Roma and Ashkali refugees from Kosovo at the end of the 1990s. Finally, I will analyse the debate around the alternatives to 'nomad camps', and look at the different initiatives taken towards this goal, which in Florence emerged earlier than in Venice and the rest of Italy.

Roma and Sinti in Florence before the Kosovo crisis

The 'discovery' of the Roma

The transit of Roma from former Yugoslavia, mainly from Kosovo and Macedonia, to Florence started in the 1960s (Marcetti et al. 1994). But it is with the economic crisis of Yugoslavia (see chapter 1) in the 1970s that this migration flow consolidated, mainly with the arrival of single men in search of seasonal jobs and opportunities for small trade between Italy and Yugoslavia. Following the death of Tito, the economic and political situation in the south of Yugoslavia deteriorated – in 1981, as recalled in chapter 1, a small student demonstration in Pristina turned into a general plea for democracy and Albanian nationalism – and had important repercussions on minority relations in the region. At this point, Roma migrants, initially engaged in seasonal migration movements, began to settle in Florence and soon their families began to join them.

As a result, informal settlements began to appear in small plots of land at the margin of the municipal territory. However, until 1984, the local authority adopted a *laissez faire* attitude, not taking any specific initiatives towards these new arrivals, thus reproducing broadly what was happening at the national level (cf. Chapter 4).

In 1984, during the consultation on the urban master plan (*Piano Regolatore Generale, PRG*), the local authority proposed the construction of four areas for about five hundred 'nomads' at the outskirts of Florence 'to ensure that the stay of nomads is in the best possible hygienic conditions, with obvious benefits for their social promotion and undoubted advantages for the whole community' (PRG in Tognoni 1999: 22). In the introduction to the proposal, after inviting borough authorities (*Quartieri*) to identify potential plots of land for camps, and inviting other municipalities to undertake similar initiatives, the local authority explains the rationale of the proposal, listing the needs it hoped to respond to. In these initial steps, we see a clear division between the needs of the citizens – i.e. security, hygiene, tranquillity and safety - and those of the 'nomads' – i.e. health, shelter, food and children's education. Following opposition from the residents of one of the boroughs, Quartiere Castello, where an area for hosting sixteen Romani families was planned, the local authority withdrew the plan (Marcetti et al. 1994). But, three years later, in the summer of 1987, the 'Gypsy problem' was again on the agenda after an episode of street fighting between some Italian and Romani local residents. This episode also became the trigger for the first mobilization of local anti-racist and human rights activists on the Roma issue. Piero Colacicchi, an activist for Roma rights for twenty years and a resident in the Castello neighbourhood, recalls the moment when he first encountered the Roma and began to build a long lasting relationship with them.

Up to September 1987, most of us [activists] had never been in touch with the Roma. Of course, we had seen them on the street, but being vaguely aware of their presence is obviously very much different from going to their settlement and talk to them. Since then I have spent so much time with them, but before that summer I hadn't really thought of their concrete circumstances (author's interview, 2005).

The public attitude at the time is captured by the headline of the daily 'La Nazione' (12 September 1987): 'Gypsies, who wants them? It is not going to be easy [to find a solution]. The truth is: no one wants the Gypsies, neither Castello nor anywhere else'. The mobilization of Colacicchi and others managed to keep the pressure on the local authority high, and to make sure that if a decision to intervene was to be taken this would be not exclusively in terms of forced eviction of Roma.

On 11 October 1987, the Mayor issued a Mayoral order (*Ordinanza sindacale*) which acknowledged that the local authority cannot leave the sixteen Romani families in their current unauthorised settlement any longer, because of the reactions of local residents in Castello and the poor living conditions in the Romani settlement. The Mayor ordered the 'urgent transfer' of the families to a municipal area in *via dell'Olmatelyo*. The decision was meant to be temporary for two main reasons: firstly, the plot of land was already allocated for a different use - namely, the expansion of the railways; and secondly, it was not complying with the requirements for 'nomad camps' set in the regional law under discussion at the time of the decision (Colacicchi 1996). Despite these caveats, the camp has been in existence in its *temporariness* for more than two decades.

Colacicchi and one of the original inhabitants of the settlement recall the assembly in which the decision to move the sixteen families was taken, and how camp residents felt about the new arrangement:

Initially, the Roma and, as a consequence, us were pleased with this new arrangement. Up until then, they had been evicted frequently, from the small settlement they built under the motorway bridges, in garbage dump sites and other horrid places, without running water or toilets. The opening of official camps seemed to us a big improvement. But the troubles were soon to begin (author's interview, 2006)

At the beginning, life here was pleasant, we were not so many – sixteen families. Then the number of people increased and the camp became too small for all of us (Roma resident in the Olmatello camp, quoted in Lapov 2004: 57).

At the City Council Assembly, a group of councillors invited 'all borough councillors (*consiglieri di Quartiere*) to work together to identify a number of small areas to be

used as camps for nomads' (Tognoni 1999: 26). Since the very beginning, the size of the areas and the idea of 'spreading the burden' on a wider territory as a measure to avoid concentration are important aspects of the debate on the issue.

A few months later, as a result of local residents' mobilisation against the Roma's informal settlements in other neighbourhoods, a new campsite was set up in the Poderaccio area in *Quartiere 4*. Here the local authority began to concentrate Romani families informally settled elsewhere. Therefore, in parallel and as a result of the opening of two official camps, Florence witnessed also the disappearance of any other space for Roma to settle. The official camps became a magnet for the Romani families living in Florence, and small informal settlements hosting relatives and friends of official camp residents began to appear in the vicinity of the official campsites.

The Regional law no. 17/1988 (Interventions for the protection of Roma ethnicity) which was passed the following year is an important part in this process. Art 1 states:

The Region dictates the norms for safeguarding the cultural heritage of 'Roma' and removing the obstacles to the fulfilment of the right to nomadism and halt in the regional territory and access to social and health services.

The right to nomadism is at the core of the law. To achieve such a goal, the Region invites individual local authorities and consortia to build 'camps' for sedentary nomads (those willing to stay for longer than 30 days) and for nomads in transit (willing to stay less than 30 days) (L.R. Toscana n.17/1988). Tuscany regional law on Roma provides an example of what I have analysed in chapter 5, namely the way in which nomadism and nomadic culture are key to the construction of discourses that legitimise the creation of *ad hoc* housing solutions which isolate the Roma from the rest of society (cf. Sigona 2002, 2005).

The beneficiaries of the law are, according to art 1, the Roma, 'understood in the broader meaning of the term'. It is interesting to point out that the use of the ethnonym 'Roma' was, at that point, still very rare in Italian public and legal discourse. Moreover, while no further clarification is given regarding the target population, in the main text of the law the use of 'Roma' and 'nomads' are

synonymous and again camps, their typology, locations and architectural features are the main feature of the law (see Picker 2008). Importantly, the first regional law gives no enforcement power to the regional authority. It is completely up to the local authorities to apply the regional guidelines and consequently have access to regional funding for this purpose.

At the beginning of the 1990s we see a shift from the discourse on the protection of nomadism to a more law and order -oriented rhetoric. For Piasere, however, the law 17/1988, despite its rhetoric on 'safeguarding nomadism', already contains strong disciplinary measures. In particular he points to art. 16 in which the right to reside in the camp is subjected to the schooling of children.

In March 1990, the mayor ordered the 'forced removal of the nomads from the areas near the Poderaccio camp and from any other [unauthorised] settlements on the municipal territory'⁸⁶. The order also contains a list of individuals who were authorized to stay in the camp. The following year, the removal of unauthorised residents from the Olmatello camp⁸⁷ was ordered. In the winter of 1993, the Olmatello camp goes through a major refurbishment. An infirmary, some toilets, a container for reception, 24 hour monitoring service, and a concrete wall all around the area are built as part of the operation.

⁸⁶ Comune di Firenze. Ordinanza n. 836, 26 March 1990

⁸⁷ Comune di Firenze. Ordinanza n. 3529, 9 November 1991

Figure 9: Locations of main Romani settlements in Florence

A new Regional law 'Interventions for the Roma and Sinti peoples'(L.R. n. 73/1995) replaced the Regional law n. 17/1988 This act is the result of a long process of consultation in which local activists and NGOs took an active part. In particular, the Michelucci Foundation's work (Marcetti et al 1994; Mori 1998) informed the discussion on the new law and provided baseline data previously lacking on the Romani communities living in and transiting through Tuscany. The key finding of research was that Romani communities are mostly sedentary and therefore camps should not be taken as the best housing solutions for catering for the needs of these communities. This work had a significant impact upon the policy making process by anchoring the discussion to more concrete realities. As a result, the overall discourse on these communities began to move away from the nomadic frame, which dominated the previous law. This is exemplified in the shift from 'campi di sosta' [long stay campsites] or 'campi di transito' [short stay campsites] for 'nomads' to 'aree attrezzate residenziali' [residential serviced sites] and 'aree attrezzate per il transito' [short stay serviced sites], and the inclusion of measures for promoting Roma access to mainstream housing. The Regional law n.73/1995 can be considered the first official recognition of the inadequacy of 'nomad camps' and the need to 'go beyond nomad camps'. However, the shift in discourse has taken a long time to be fully implemented, as we will see later.

A former member of the local government in charge of neighbourhoods and social affairs (1995-1999), recalls this turning point.

In the 1995 political programme of the new mayor Mario Primicerio there was a chapter entitled 'Going beyond nomad camps'. One of the first initiatives taken by the Primicerio government was to ask me, as councillor in charge for social affairs and neighbourhoods, to get the support from neighbourhood authorities and identify with them some plots of land where to build micro-villages for Roma (author's interview, 2005).

The main housing project to spring up from the 1995 regional law and the local government initiative was the Guarlone village (six small houses with a communal open area), which was built to accommodate some of the inhabitants of the Poderaccio camp. It was the first concrete attempt to move away from camp policy. However, the pilot project, despite being successful according to most interviewees, was never replicated due to the harsh opposition of local residents, and fear of electoral loss by the local authority (see Fondazione Michelucci 1998, 2006)⁸⁸.

Poderaccio and Olmatello: a tale of two camps

Since their creation, the camps have followed diverging trajectories. This difference has manifested itself in different ways over the years and has been visible in the very structure of the camps, as well as in the social and community dynamics among residents, and the general perception of the camps in the city. My interviewees have provided a number of explanations. Among Romani activists, different migration histories and intra-community factors are the main reasons for explaining the difference between the two camps, as the following quotes illustrate:

I believe that every community needs two or three fundamental things: first of all, religion; the second is the capacity of getting organised and finally some work. If in a community there are four or five people who know how to mobilize the others and create harmony in the community one can really manage to do something positive.

⁸⁸ Opposition to the initiatives taken by the Primicerio government was led by right wing groups that in less than two months after the plan to build villages for Roma was announced, manage to collect over 20,000 signatures on a petition to 'expel nomads from Florence' (see *La Repubblica*, 3 October 1995).

Religion is important because it impacts on people, not everyone is a believer, but everyone belongs and this sense of belonging is stronger among Poderaccio inhabitants (author's interview, 2005).

Many Omatello residents have been in Italy for over thirty years, I know of a guy, he is 32 years old now and was born in Verona. He got married in Florence and has seven siblings, all born in Italy. He has lived all his life in a nomad camp. Instead, the inhabitants of the Poderaccio camp have been in Italy for fifteen years or so, some even came more recently (author's interview, 2005).

Other explanations came from local activists and politicians who pointed instead to the different strategies of camp governance adopted by the Quartiere 4 and 5, and to the different urban and social structures of the two neighbourhoods as two of the main reasons of the difference between the two camps⁸⁹. A local activist explains the differences between Quartieri 4 and 5.

Perhaps it is because the social and spatial structures of the neighbourhoods are different. Quartiere 4 was already a sort of ghetto, isolated from the rest of Florence and it grew as a city inside the city. Because of this, whatever happened in the neighbourhood it was the responsibility of the local government [Q4 government] to deal with it (author's interview, 2006).

Quartiere 5, instead, is less spatially and socially coherent, without a strong local identity, and the Omatello camp has always been perceived as an enclave in the neighbourhood:

There has never been someone or something that could really connect the Omatello camp to its neighbourhood. The camp has always been one of many small islands in the archipelago of abandoned realities that is Quartiere 5 (author's interview with a local activist, 2005).

Initially, the local authority and, from 1996 onwards with the devolution of the responsibility over the management of camps to borough councils, the Quartieri 4 and 5 have approached the two camps differently.

⁸⁹ In the final section of this chapter, I will return to the different styles of governance in relation to the strategies put forward for the closure of the camps.

Figure 10: Photos of campsites in Florence.

According to Fondazione Michelucci (2006), as a consequence of the devolution and of the different political and administrative approaches of Q4 and Q5, the differences between the two camps increased. While the Olmatello was meant to be a pilot model camp, at the Poderaccio camp the Romani families that were moved there from elsewhere in town were given more freedom to organise their spaces. For Colacicchi, the Poderaccio camp, since the beginning, was mainly built by the residents, who took advantage of the absence of clear guidance from the local authority.

It was as if they had been told: 'do it yourself' and they divided the space according to their needs. This is what gave the camp the look of a village that is the product of residents' human relations and real needs (author's interview, 2006).

Conversely, the Olmatello camp was planned and designed by the local planning office and embodies, a local activist adds, a 'bureaucratic vision which did not take

into account the creative contribution of inhabitants'. The result is a place that looks like a 'human parking site' (see Piasere 1991).

Census, quotas and changing labels

Over the 1990s, the local authority and the prefecture intervened on several instances, to regulate and discipline the population in camps, claiming the incapacity of Florence to cope with increasing number of Roma. These measures were often criticised by local activists. The Fondazione Michelucci was particularly vocal against an approach that was 'neither calibrated to the housing stock durability, nor to the residents' housing practice. Instead, they were conducted without any participation of the families living in the camps, who were pigeonholed in a generic and abstract nomadic world' (Fondazione Michelucci 1995: 52).

In 1990 the local authority set Florence a maximum tolerated quota of Roma of 350 units. In 1994 the quota was increased to 550. Several local censuses were conducted over these years. In 1993, the local authority introduced the label '*famiglia storica*' (literally, 'historical family') to identify those who were already living in the camps in 1988, 1989 and 1990 censuses. The bureaucratic recognition of the length of stay in Florence through the label '*famiglia storica*' came with some entitlements, such as being prioritised in the waiting list for entering one of the authorised camps. As mentioned earlier, since the late 1980s, when the camps were set up, informal settlements had appeared in their vicinity often hosting relatives and friends of the official camp residents. Why did so many people want a place in the official camps? There are several reasons. In Chapter 5, for example, I referred to the absence of adequate asylum reception facilities, and in Chapter 10, I will introduce the concept of 'campzanship' to explain what I term 'the comfort of exceptionality'. For the moment, I wish to focus upon one of them in particular: the toughening of criteria for immigrants' legal residence following the introduction in 1990 of the so-called *Martelli* law on immigration (n. 39/1990). With this law, access to residence permits for foreign residents became more stringent, and the '*residenza anagrafica*' [inscription in the local residents' register] became a central requirement for obtaining or renewing a permit to stay in Italy. A place in an official camp meant to automatically receive the '*residenza anagrafica*' and potentially a

first step towards the access to public housing. However, in order to get a place in the camps, the person had to be legally resident in Italy at the moment of applying. For Colacicchi,

It was a paradox, a vicious circle which we denounced and condemned many times in those years (author's interview, 2005).

In 1994, following a request from the Provincial authority and the lobbying of local activists, the Italian Refugee Council (CIR) was invited to carry out a census of the formal and informal camps' residents as a first step towards the determination of their legal status and entitlements in accordance with the Law n.390/1992.

The aim of the census was to ascertain the country of origin and time of arrival in Italy of the Roma. According to the law, those who had fled from Yugoslavia to Italy after 10 June 1991⁹⁰, were entitled to humanitarian protection, a residence permit valid initially for one year, which was successively renewed until the official end of the conflict. The humanitarian status also allowed people to work. For a senior social worker of Quartiere 4, the census was a positive development and, 'an important step forward because it managed to impose the concept that a Rom can be also a refugee, affirming the equality of all citizens from former Yugoslavia' (author's interview, 2005).

The humanitarian protection did not cover: the Yugoslavian citizens already resident in Italy – despite the fact that because of the war they were not able to go back to the country; those who had already received a deportation order; and those who were unable to provide evidence of their date of entry in Italy.

As a result of the CIR census, the Roma were divided in two categories: 'displaced people' (*sfollati* in Italian) (circa 450 people) and 'historical residents' (*storici* in Italian) (circa 600 people). The initial screening of the census data was done at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Successively, according to some informants, the decision was left to the local prefecture, who implemented the legislation taking a 'soft

⁹⁰ A ministerial circular (no. 15 of the 20 April 1993) established this date as the official beginning of the war in Yugoslavia.

approach': that is giving the humanitarian protection also to people not fitting all the criteria above.

It is worth noting, at this moment, the shift in the meaning of the label 'historical residents/families', which as a result of the census is *synchronised* to the timeframe established at the national level by the law n. 390/92. Another interesting aspect as far as the labels are concerned is pointed out by a social worker.

It was funny to see how, when we began to visit camps, everyone wanted to be recognised as 'historical' and no one wanted to be a 'displaced person'; when they found out that being a 'displaced person' meant to get a permit to stay, social assistance and accommodation, then everyone wanted to be a 'displaced person' and no one a 'historical' (author's interview, 2006).

What I term *synchronisation* had significant 'effects of truth' that, as the quote above has illustrated, were swiftly translated into different *labelling practices* by institutional actors as well as the Roma who responded by adapting their strategies to the changing discursive and policy frames.

Roughly half of the *displaced* Roma were resettled in other municipalities in Tuscany. The resettlement, according to some interviewees, was conducted in a poorly planned way. A senior social worker at the Prefecture of Florence offers what can be an explanation of why this happened,

At the beginning of the 1990s we began to witness the first arrivals from ex-Yugoslavia. They used to arrive here confused, without knowing what they were expected to do. It is at that time that we, social workers and civil servants, found out what was possible to do concerning asylum. To be honest, we have learned the law together with them.

The remaining *displaced* Roma, despite now being legally residents in Italy, were not offered any housing assistance, and continued to live at the Masini camp, a large informal settlement near the Poderaccio camp.

The resettlement programme lasted till 1997, when funding from the Law n. 390/92 ran out. The prefecture and local authority were no longer able to support the housing of Romani families. Many of them had been placed in hotels for several months, and support for families was cut abruptly. A social worker illustrates the

situation, pointing out in particular the different approaches taken by small dispersal towns, where families had been offered accommodation, but also social support towards integration and financial autonomy, vis-à-vis Florence where,

The local authority had kept these people for a year and half in hotels and pensions, without any contacts with social services, without developing any project with them, and suddenly one morning the local authority told them: 'well, the money has run out, please leave' (author's interview, 2006).

The arrival of Roma and Ashkali refugees from Kosovo in the late 1990s

For many Romani families, 1999 was the year of the flight, of disgraces, many reunited with wives and siblings escaping from Kosovo, some lost family members on the journey through the Adriatic Sea (social worker, Quartiere 4, Florence, author's interview, 2005).

We arrived in Florence in 1999. In Kosovo was horrible. We flew by boat and we were given shelter in a reception centre. I have relatives at the Oلماتello camp, but we were not allowed to stay there (Romani woman, Florence, author's interview, 2006).

In 1999, when the situation in former Yugoslavia was forcing more and more Roma and Ashkali to flee in search of a safe haven, it became difficult to count how many Roma and Ashkali were living in camps. However, interviewees all agree that the situation in official and informal camps, the Masini camp in particular, became overcrowded and living conditions worsened. The response of the local authorities to the arrival of displaced Roma and Ashkali from Kosovo was a mixture of closure and humanitarian assistance. Concerns over public health and safety led the Mayor of Florence to issue two Mayoral orders on 5 and 11 August 1999 (*Ordinanza* n. 5412/1999 and 5514/1999), at the peak of the ethnic cleansing on non-Albanian minorities by Kosovo Albanian returnees in the NATO-liberated Kosovo. In the first order, without referring even cursorily to the causes of flight, the mayor states that 'since the end of July there have been sudden, unexpected and numerically significant new arrivals at the Poderaccio and Oلماتello nomad camps and at the area 'Masini', and this has caused a 'visible deterioration of hygienic conditions' which, according to the Local Health Authority sent to assess the situation,

constitutes 'a public health hazard' (*Ordinanza* n. 5412/1999). The proposed solution was to urge other public authorities to take care of the resettlement of new comers whilst the local police were in charge of preventing newer arrivals from entering the camps.

Noteworthy in this *Ordinanza*, the assimilation of the Masini area, an informal settlement, to the two official camps, exemplar of the ambiguity embedded in local authorities' approach to the governance of formal and informal camps.

However, less than a week later, the mayor issued a new order (*Ordinanza* n. 5514/1999) with the same objective and rationale, but with an interesting amendment. The Masini area was now enlisted separately from the official camps, and the mayor detailed a different strategy for the arrivals in this area: the removal and immediate demolition of the caravans and shacks as soon as the displaced Roma are resettled somewhere else, 'in order to avoid that these places may become a pull factor for newer arrivals' (*Ordinanza* n.5514/1999). But what happens to those who reached Florence after 5 August 1999? A social worker in Quartiere 5 explains:

The orders came into force on the day the first order was issued [5 August], as a consequence those who entered in the camps before 5 August were entitled to claim the permission to stay. Those who came later were out (author's interview, 2005).

By refusing to accept any new arrivals, the local authority was in practice refusing also any resettlement responsibility towards the people who arrived after 5 August.

Between June and August 1999, the transit of circa 400 Kosovo Roma and Ashkali was recorded in Florence. According to a fact-finding report by *Azione Comune* (Bergman 1999), more than half of them found shelter in the existing camps. 162 were resettled in towns outside Florence, and 90 people in a reception centre just outside town: the ex-hospital 'Banti'. In the following months, especially after the mayoral orders, the 'Banti' became the main reception facility in Florence. A social worker from Quartiere 4 estimated that more than 200 Kosovo Roma were hosted in the centre between August and December 1999. The ex-hospital had already been employed as reception centre in June 1999, for Kosovo Albanians. The local authority was initially reluctant to use the facility for Roma, but pressure from

neighbourhood authorities and NGOs succeeded in forcing the local authority to offer temporary shelter to Kosovo Romani refugees there. Some of them were later resettled in small towns around Tuscany and Emilia Romagna (mainly Rimini) through the network of municipalities, NGOs and voluntary groups of the *Azione Comune* project, which was created to provide assistance to displaced people from ex-Yugoslavia.

The arrival of the Roma and other displaced people from Kosovo is central to defining the contours of the Italian asylum regime, and in particular the asylum reception system that developed out of a range of diverse practices initiated by local authorities, NGOs and Church organisations to address the emergency caused not by the arrival of the refugees *per se*, but by the absence of a national asylum policy and reception system (ICS et al. 2000; ICS 2005; Sigona 2004, 2005; Hein 2000; Vicenzi 2000). The *Azione Comune* project set the footprint on which was successively developed into the National Asylum Programme (NAP) (see chapter 4 for a discussion on the asylum regime in Italy). ANCI, the National Association of Italian Municipalities, played a central role in developing a horizontal network of support and assistance in which municipalities worked together with non-institutional actors to provide shelter and integration projects for refugees. A Florence-based civil servant at ANCI explains the process which led to the creation of the NAP,

NAP was born from an idea developed at the local level, not from the centre, to address the emerging problems related to asylum. It was an experiment in the absence of anything else to help asylum seekers. However, it is an experiment that remains unfinished because of the lack of a national legal framework to deal with asylum and the cut in state funding. At the moment, municipalities are putting in money from their core budget, but this can't last for long (author's interview, 2002).

Like in Venice in 1999, once again, there was confusion and conflict over the identity and status of newcomers. For many institutional and non-institutional actors, as well as for the broader public, they were just 'Gypsies', therefore undeserving of humanitarian protection as refugees (Tognoni 1999). The labelling issue is again on the table. Local activists and sympathetic individuals inside the

institutions involved in the management of this population were aware of the importance of 'rebranding' the Roma in order to give them better opportunities. However, not everyone can be a 'refugee' and, at this stage, it is more the lack of resources and the limited places available in the newborn asylum reception system that determines the status of individuals than their motivation for migration and the fear of persecution.

A civil servant explains how re-labelling the Roma opened up new opportunities for change and triggered a chain of positive reactions in resettlement towns as they began to refer to this population not through the stereotyping image of the 'Gypsy', but as refugees.

As far as the Roma are concerned, there have been many failures. However, by changing the terminology and using instead the word 'refugees', it became possible to experiment with new solutions. The positive results achieved enabled the creation of a positive environment where small municipalities could engage with the reality of refugees, and to some extent of Roma, as at some point the truth did come out (author's interview, 2006).

Moved into the Azione Comune's (later NAP) reception programme, Romani and Ashkali families disappeared from the radar of Florence local politics and their whereabouts became difficult to retrieve. They became part of the history of other towns and cities, and very soon disappeared from the public discourse on Roma and Ashkali in Florence.

In the next section, I will focus on the discourse on 'going beyond camps' and investigate the policy and practice developed and implemented to this end.

No more camps for Roma

'Spreading the burden' and/or 'closing down the camps': different routes to resettlement

The dispersal of Roma in the territory of Tuscany and beyond started in the mid 1990s. The first significant initiative was taken in 1994 by the neighbourhood authority of Quartiere 4 together with NGOs and church groups, who tried to get

the support of the local authorities near Florence to resettle small groups of Q4-based Roma. 'A family in every city' was the slogan of this initiative that 'produced almost no results' (Fondazione Michelucci 2006: 3). Resistance came not only from the municipalities that were unwilling to host families of 'Gypsies', but also from the Romani families, who did not want to leave Florence and the support network provided by the proximity of relatives and friends. The idea of 'spreading the burden', however, did not disappear and resurfaced in different guises over the years, revealing a top-down approach to the Romani population which, despite the stated good intentions, treat them as unwanted objects rather than active social actors.

Following the CIR census in 1994, the prefecture took the lead on this issue, lobbying local authorities and succeeding in resettling a number of families of 'displaced' Roma in Tuscany and Emilia Romagna. Financial incentives – 18 Euros per person per day from the budget of the Law no. 390/92 – were not the only support provided by the prefecture. A social worker at the prefecture explains:

What we offered to these local authorities was our knowledge of the families and individuals, thus providing a sort of mediation with local social services that had no experience of working with foreigners.

Since 1995, with the second regional law on Roma and Sinti (no. 73/1995), the regional authority also began to engage more proactively with this issue, inviting municipalities to develop housing projects for Roma according to the guidelines of the regional law. The Guarlone village in Florence was funded by the regional authority and was the first institutional attempt to develop a housing solution targeted at the Roma which was not a 'nomad camp'.

There are two important differences between these initiatives. The prefecture-led resettlement project was targeted at individual Romani families and not to the overall Romani population. Moreover, these family were selected not as 'Roma', but as 'refugees and displaced people'. This is illustrated in the following quote from a social worker engaged in preparing social services in resettlement municipalities for the arrival of new comers.

Social services in those municipalities don't even know how to work with foreigners,

just imagine if we went in one of these towns and said: 'we are moving here two Romani families', there would be an uprising! Instead, we told them: 'we are bringing here two families of refugees fled from the war in ex-Yugoslavia', everyone welcomed them with open arms⁹¹ (author's interview, 2005)

The Guarlone village, instead, is targeted at 'historical Roma' and it is developed as a challenge to the persistent dominant discourse on nomadism and nomad camps. The project started in 1996 and was completed in 1998.

Initially the experiment encountered opposition by local residents but the situation calmed down after the village was built. However, the local authority led by a new mayor felt that the level of conflict and the risk of losing political capital were not worth the risk. Moreover, Fondazione Michelucci argues (2006) that to close down the camps through a Guarlone-like route would have required at least ten villages to be built in Florence: an insurmountable logistical and political issue for the local authority.

From 1997 onwards, another result of the change of orientation in the local authority was the opening up to Roma families of a new route out of camps: the possibility to compete for the allocation of public housing (ERP). However, for political and material reasons, this cannot be considered a solution able alone to lead to the closure of camps. Florence city council owns or manages 8,000 housing units, and most of them are under long-term tenancy contracts. Every year, on average, 164 units are available for being assigned to new tenants, and the waiting list is extremely long (Fondazione Michelucci 2008)⁹². In December 2001, local newspapers reported the news that the first 125 positions in the ERP (Edilizia Residenziale Pubblica) ranking for the allocation of public housing stocks, to be published in January 2002, were taken by Romani applicants. In the previous years, the presence of Roma was marginal since, until the mid 1990s, their stay in the

⁹¹ However, the warm welcome did not last long and soon local political parties, especially the Northern League, began to use the newcomers to mobilise political support.

⁹² Between 1999-2007, only 598 council flats out of 1,494 were assigned via ERF ranking. The remaining, called 'reserve', were assigned to people via social services (253), evicted people (450) and people who had won a previous ERP competition.

official camp was not recognised as 'residenza anagrafica'[official residence] in Florence, a key requirements for joining the competition (Fondazione Michelucci 2006). At December 2001, the number of Romani families in council accommodation was 33 (La Repubblica, 28 December 2001). In December 2005, the number rose to 50 families, evidently not sufficient for offering an alternative to the camps to all residents. Moreover, as Fondazione Michelucci notices (2006), during the 1990s, camps have operated as a point of reference for new flows, and newcomers have taken over empty places left by those families who moved somewhere else Therefore a gradual closure would be unlikely to succeed.

Looking more closely at how the allocation of public housing worked, the disparity between the provisional 2001 ERP ranking of Roma families and the number of actual allocations⁹³ is striking: a disparity that cannot be explained by the scarce availability of housing stock alone.

There seem to be two main explanations for this: first, the lack of housing units capable to cater for the needs of large families. Paradoxically, large families are prioritised in the criteria for the evaluation of the applications, but they are penalised when it comes to the allocation of houses through the fact that the city council housing stock includes a limited number of units capable to cater for the needs of large families⁹⁴.

Secondly, the discovery of the very high representation of Roma in the ranking, and a concern over the negative reactions of the electorate to the 'monopoly' of Roma on public housing, urged the local authority to intervene *post facto*, offering the Roma families an alternative to council flats. Interviews with key local actors revealed different 'truths' about how this key passage was handled by the local and neighbourhood authorities. It emerged, however, that an agreement had been made amongst key actors on a twofold political rationale for the local authority

⁹³ However, it should be also pointed out that in the Italian context, Florence has been one of the more 'generous' cities towards the Roma.

⁹⁴ Of course, one can wonder how come the local authority did not adjust its housing stock to the needs of the beneficiaries, and the answer is that the large majority of the large families are not Italian or ethnic Italian (cf. Fondazione Michelucci 2006; Tosi 2002).

initiative: a) to avoid social conflict (and electoral loss) over the allocation of a significant number of council flats to the Roma; and b) to avoid Roma having to wait a long time before council flats were available. Yet, some interviewees raised important concerns, which will be explored later in this section, regarding the fairness of the initiative and, in particular, of how it was implemented.

In 1999, the *Azione Comune* projects succeeded in dispersing Roma families in the regional territory. The project set the ground for the development of the asylum reception system. A Romani activist offers his view:

We tried different routes. We also got the prefect involved and we asked him to move the Roma out of the nomad camps, I'm talking of those who are refugees. It was useful because we succeeded in moving many people out of the camps. They now live in flats, even outside Tuscany. But, despite this, the camps still exist (author's interview, 2006)

The success of *Azione Comune*, a former City Councillor for Social Affairs suggests, was very much due to two factors: the fact that ARCI, the main NGO in Tuscany, involved with tens of branches all over the region, had managed to anchor the project to the discourse on emergency assistance for refugees from Yugoslavia, and the bypassing of institutional stalemate by pursuing the 'market' route.

When I was a member of the local government, I went to Siena and other tourist towns and they completely ignored me. I was there to ask if they want to host a few families and they don't even bother to answer. Things changed when ARCI, first with *Azione Comune* and later with NAP, began to search for empty flats on the market and only once the contract was signed I got in touch with local social services (author's interview, 2006).

The results achieved through the 'market route' taught an important lesson to ARCI and the Florence local authority, a strategy that they would replicate for the 'Progetto Regionale Rom', which I now will go on to discuss.

In 2000, the regional authority passed a new law for Roma and Sinti (Regional Law no. 2/2000 – Measures for Roma and Sinti peoples), in which the discourse on going beyond nomad camps is now firmly consolidated. An important change brought by the new act concerned the strengthened role of the Region, which had more power

to put pressure and even impose on municipalities that are reluctant to take responsibility for the housing needs of local Roma and Sinti communities, to intervene.

Art 1 of the Regional Law n. 2/2000 states the aim of the measures:

Safeguarding the identity and cultural development of Roma and Sinti in order to promote communication between cultures, protect the right to nomadism, halt and residence in the regional territory, as well as the fruition and access to social, educational and school services'

Partly in response to the new legislation and the pressure that the new arrivals from Kosovo had put on the urban camps, and partly in response to the 'risk' of Roma taking over many council flats and an injunction by a judge who threatened to lock up the camps if the local authority had not intervened urgently to improve the living conditions, the local authority and the Quartiere 4 began to discuss the regeneration of the Poderaccio and Masini camps through the creation of 'community villages'. However, due to the impossibility of identifying plots of land suitable for the purpose without causing major opposition, the Q4, eventually, decided to build the new villages on the site of the old Poderaccio camp, as this account from a civil servant illustrates:

Basically we didn't manage to identify not even one plot of land in town. Well, we found suitable plots but no one wanted to live near these villages. Hence, the neighbours of the Roma will be the fire brigades, a few shops and a school for training dogs (author's interview, 2006).

This choice had important consequences for the project, as the Poderaccio area is located in a flood area of the Arno river, and by law it is forbidden to build permanent houses there. Therefore, in order to get the permission from the River Authority, the new housing structures had to be temporary and without concrete foundations. These limitations impacted on the realization of the project which started in 2000 and finished only four years later with the opening of the first village. The second village followed in November 2005.

Once again, a regeneration project for the Roma relies on a temporary and precarious housing solution. This is exemplified by the fact that the new villages are

built with housing units previously used to accommodate the population of Umbria displaced by the earthquake in 1997. The expiration date of the units is seven years. A supporter of the current project recognises its limitations.

Evidently there has been a regress with respect to the Guarlone village. This is undeniable. On the other hand, with respect to the situation in the Poderaccio and Masini camps, with the villages, the living conditions have improved. It was a quick fix while people wait for the council flats to be available (author's interview, 2005).

A resident of the new village echoes the previous statement:

Now we are better. Each family has got its own bathroom and utilities' meter. People seem to treat us better and children are happy.

But field research also revealed another side of the villages, which to some extent contradicts the view of the supporter of the new villages in relation to the future prospective for villagers. Moving into the villages meant that the inhabitants of the Poderaccio and Masini camps lost their position in the ERP ranking, because despite the village still being temporary the local authority deemed them to no longer be in 'a degraded housing situation', which is one of the criteria for assessing the council housing claims. A social worker from Quartiere 5 poignantly compares the long term impact of the two strategies adopted by Q4 and Q5.

I don't think the regeneration has solved much, to be honest. The living conditions may be better now in the villages, but in two years time, the residents of the Olmatello camp will be still gradually moving out from the camp as soon as the council flats are available, while for the inhabitants of the new villages this won't happen anymore (author's interview, 2005).

It is worth noting that many Roma interviewees lamented that they were not adequately informed on the consequences of moving to the villages when they signed the contract of agreement with the municipality. An inhabitant of the new villages explains his disappointment.

They didn't tell us anything. They were really sly! They didn't tell us we had 13 points in the ERP ranking, if we knew, we would have stayed in the camp a bit longer and now we would have a flat, but they didn't inform us (author's interview, 2006).

During fieldwork I was unable to determine if and how the Roma were informed on the medium-long term consequences of the move into the villages and to what extent the provisional ERP ranking mentioned earlier was purposely kept confidential until the local authority had signed the letter of agreements with the Romani families of the Poderaccio and Masini camps. Was it an example of poor intercultural communication or the result of a specific political strategy? Interviewee accounts on this point diverge. The narratives seem to compose a complex scenario in which the different agendas found some kind of temporary accommodation in the community village solution, leaving the medium-long term impacts of yet another emergency solution pending.

Institutional arrangements and the implementation of the 'Progetto Regionale'

In this final section, I will discuss in further detail one of the resettlement projects which have been developed and implemented in Tuscany, where, it is argued, two key streams of the local public discourse on the Roma issue - 'going beyond camps' and 'spreading the burden' - conflate.

The title of the project, 'Progetto Regionale Rom' [Regional Project for Roma], already offers some hints on the 'beneficiaries' and the geographic, institutional, and discursive scope of the project: respectively, the Roma, the regional territory, the regional policy for Roma, and the regional discourse on Roma and Sinti.

However, a clarification on the actual Roma 'beneficiaries' of the project is useful to set the ground for discussion. The point of departure is the fact that not all the Poderaccio and Masini camp residents were offered a place in the new 'temporary' villages. Moreover, the forced eviction of an informal settlement on the Arno river bank in 2000 (ex-Drage) had also left many long established (but often precarious in their legal status) Romani families roofless. To find a solution for these families, for whom the local authority felt there was no place in Florence, it commissioned three NGOs (ARCI, Caritas and Madonnina del Grappa) to provide temporary accommodation for them and to work on individualised resettlement plans outside Florence. The three organisations worked with the political and financial support of the local authority but met several obstacles, especially for long term resettlement.

Limited financial resources and lack of response from other local authorities pressed Florence local government to seek the intervention of the Regional government. A letter of understanding [*Protocollo d'Intesa* in Italian] between the Regional authority, Florence local authority and the regional branch of ANCI (National Association of Italian Municipalities) was signed on 21 March 2003, and eventually the Regional government included the Roma issue among its programmatic priorities for 2004-2007 (Regione Toscana et al 2003). This is when the 'Progetto Regionale' officially started. However, some of the resettled families were under the care of the implementation agencies of the project in its first incarnation. A local politician offers a vivid account of the origin of the project.

Everything started from the situation of Florence. It was said: Florence built the Guarlone village, the new Poderaccio village, and will soon build the second village for the inhabitants of the Masini camp. Florence also helped the families from the Arno river bank to resettle. Nonetheless, there are some families who are left out from each of these paths for different reasons. These families should be looked after by the Regional authority and the regional authority replied: 'we will take care of the extreme cases, those who couldn't be absorbed through the physiologic channels of the city'. Basically, in the project there are the *leftovers* of all the other initiatives (author's interview, 2006).

The letter of understanding lists the aims and objectives of the partnership and the instruments used to achieve them.

The aim of the memorandum is to initiate and implement a regional pilot project to become a model of good practice for Roma social inclusion, through a system of synergic actions coordinated with the Roma (art 1, *Protocollo d'Intesa*, 21 March 2003).

The regional pilot project, it is explained in the letter of understanding (art 2), 'in order to promote and sustain processes of social integration, develops an individualised reception, settlement and assistance intervention for Romani families'. In response to the difficulties encountered by the Florence authority and its implementation partners, to get other municipalities to welcome Romani families, the Region commits itself to 'guarantee from the beginning an adequate institutional and financial support to local communities that participate to the

scheme' (ibidem). The main tool to be envisaged for such purpose is a 'Regional Solidarity Fund'. The letter of understanding also details the time frame for the implementation of individualised plans⁹⁵ and the prioritised groups of families to be resettled according to the local authority agenda.

At the end of 2005, the project had only partially been implemented, mainly because of the delays in construction of the two new villages, and the promised 'solidarity fund' had just been created – with 160,000 Euros. At the time, the number of families engaged in the project was 32 (211 persons).

Among the former Masini inhabitants, 50% have been in the project since the summer of 2002, before the regional authority was involved. The remaining 50% entered the project in November 2005, when the Masini camp was dismantled and most of its inhabitants were transferred to the new village.

The map shows where Romani families were dispersed, and the size of the towns involved.

⁹⁵ Phase 1 lasts four months and covers the initial agreement with the Romani family, the relocation into a flat and the drafting of the individualised plan – at this stage it will be also assessed if there is room for an assisted return; phase 2 covers, over a period on 12 months, the implementation of the plan, particularly through 'assistance towards autonomy' and financial support; finally, phase 3 aims to achieve 'complete autonomy' in a year, plus a further two years of support (*accompagnamento*).

Figure 11:Map of dispersal in Tuscany through 'Progetto Regionale Rom'

Some NGO workers lamented the lack of 'diplomatic' support from the regional authority and ANCI, which had made the search for available stocks more challenging than expected. An employee of one of the implementing bodies offers some insights into this 'painful subject'.

Honestly, we have huge difficulties. There was a commitment by the authorities to

⁹⁶ Over 10 families were resettled in the province of Livorno, but data on specific locations are not available.

activate diplomatic channels with dispersal municipalities, with prefectures and local health services. The 'solidarity fund' mentioned in the memorandum of understanding would have provided the financial backing of/for these actions. In actual facts, we had to do almost everything alone, relying on the baggage of experience we developed in other reception and resettlement projects [i.e. Azione Comune and NAP], and ultimately resettle people where accommodation was more affordable (author's interview, 2005).

In actual fact, this meant that ARCI had to rely mainly on its own network of branches in the region, and on the officers in charge of finding accommodation for asylum seekers in the NAP system, who saw their workload increased to include the Roma.

A senior civil servant in Florence confirms the facts, while offering a different perspective. The local authority had to face a choice between the hostility to dispersal by other local authorities, driven mainly by electoral considerations, and the unsustainable living conditions of the Roma. The latter were given priority and resettlement was organised despite the opposition of local authorities. How this was managed, is summed up by a senior civil servant in Florence:

We had to choose between spending a long time negotiating with unwilling local authorities and Roma's survival. We chose the latter. If local authorities hear me saying this, they will shoot us [laughing]. But this is it. Florence could rely on the alibi that negotiations [according to the memorandum of understanding] were up to the regional authority; while the regional authority had the alibi of having misinterpreted the agreement (author's interview, 2006).

A local politician actively involved in the *Progetto Regionale* offers some insight into the political battle around the regional dispersal programme, and the tension between the shared political culture (Tuscany is historically the stronghold of the communist, then social democratic, party) and the opposition of local administrators, who for electoral reason did not want resettlement in their towns.

ARCI and the other NGOs found some suitable flats and rented them. Then they moved the first families in and only at this point they approached local authorities. It was very hard, because the local authorities replied: 'you bastards, you are informing us now, once you are already here. If only you had approached us before', what

hypocrites! I believe we chose the best solution, even if it was undeniably difficult (author's interview, 2006).

Prioritising the cost of accommodation over other criteria inevitably impacted on the process of settlement of newcomers, both in the sense of providing adequate job opportunities and social services, and in the sense of breaking family ties and affecting dispersed families intra-community support and solidarity networks. A Romani interviewee and an activist offer their views on the implementation of the project:

I work in the day and sometimes also during the night as a dish-washer. Before, it only took ten minutes by moped to get to work; now instead it is more than an hour (author's interview with a Rom dispersed outside Florence, 2006).

Dispersed Roma tell us not very reassuring news about their new arrangements. Overcrowded flats, with fifteen people in three bedrooms, children taken away from their school half way through the school year and now uprooted. All the efforts to promote integration done before have been lost (author's interview, 2005)

The specific history behind the selection of the beneficiaries of the resettlement project, the fact they were people deemed unsuitable or unfit for staying in Florence but who had spent years in that town developing their livelihood strategies and social networks, should also be taken into account, as it impacts on the likelihood of a positive or negative settlement. The Romani cultural mediator in charge of liaising with the Romani families explains some of the difficulties he encounters in his job.

Despite my effort to translate, sometimes it is difficult for them to understand the aims of the project. They understand that one day they are expected to become financially independent. But it is not clear to them how this is going to happen. Maybe this depends on their culture and tradition; I believe they may need more time (author's interview, 2005)

However, the 'blame' is not only on the Roma. He also points to the kind of assistance provided by the NGO and how it may lead to dependence despite the stated intention of promoting autonomy:

There are several social workers who help them, one in charge of children's health, one for children's schooling... sometimes I've got the feeling that they are doing too much, more than what should be done (author's interview, 2005).

Finally, there is a significant material aspect to be considered: the lack of cooperation from other local authorities, and the decision to pursue the 'market route', means that Romani families are subject to the private housing market, They therefore have to cope with the high costs of running a house without in many cases having the economic resources and security for doing so. This, inevitably, has forced the agencies to extend the period of economic support and assistance beyond the initial limits, and poses serious questions about the sustainability of the dispersal programme in the long run (Fondazione Michelucci 2006).

Conclusion

The active engagement of local institutions with the Romani population in Florence began in 1987 with the creation of the first serviced parking area for sixteen Romani families from Kosovo. This area was meant to be a temporary solution, but has lasted for over twenty years. The Olmatello camp is still where it was initially built, although in the last few years the number of residents has been significantly reduced through the allocation of long-awaited council flats to many 'historical' residents.

'Emergency' and 'temporariness' are recurring words in Florence local authority discourse on the Roma, and permeate the initiatives taken for this population: 'a chain of temporary solutions', Fondazione Michelucci argues, 'each one becoming reason and explanation for the following one' (Fondazione Michelucci 1995: 120).

The existence of camps operated as a pull factor for Romani refugees and migrants leaving Yugoslavia during the 1990s, reinforcing in local authorities the sense of urgency and emergency around the Roma. According to a senior social worker in Florence,

Between 1992 and 1999, with peaks between 1993 and 1996 and in 1999, the Olmatello and Poderaccio camps operated as refugee camps because almost no other reception facilities existed, unfortunately for us and for them considering the

living conditions in camps.

Over the years, the local government has approached the various inflows of Roma differently, adopting different policy frames. However, these have not been uncontested, and the labelling of Romani families played an important role throughout this process. The several censuses carried out in this period confirm the need for understanding and categorising the new population. Among them, the 1994 CIR census marked an important transition, namely the consolidation of the distinction between 'the historical families' and 'the displaced people'. Through the census, the institutional and policy frames attached to each of them became clearer, as well as the rights and entitlements of the labelled subjects.

In this chapter, I have explored these complex dynamics, and illustrated how strategic (re)labelling of Roma has occurred at different times over a period of fifteen years. The focus on the policy and practice of the community governing the presence of the Roma in Florence and the region has enabled me to shed light on the processes in operation, and to explore the dynamic spaces of political possibility and contestation available to the different actors of the community. In the following chapter, I will investigate more closely the spaces available to Roma and their community organisations in Florence and Venice.

Over the period under examination, three regional laws for Roma and Sinti were issued, demonstrating a lively cultural and political debate around this issue, a dialogue open to institutional and non-institutional actors, and whose final outputs (the regional laws), have provided an incentive and stimulus to local authorities and NGOs engaged with these communities. Since 1995, the regional discourse on Roma has been framed in the light of achieving the closure of the nomad camps and towards the social inclusion of the Roma in the regional social fabric. However, as my analysis has pointed out, the implementation of this overarching goal had to find a difficult balance between the demand of Florence local authority for 'burden sharing', the insufficient offer of hospitality by other local authorities, and, importantly, the needs of the Roma involved in the resettlement schemes.

The focus on housing and alternatives to camps has dominated the public debate on the Roma. Several different routes have been pursued to achieve the main goal of

closing camps. These routes, however, as poignantly observed by Fondazione Michelucci (2006: 7), were 'fragmented and more difficult to explore than expected, with significant disruptions which weakened the transformative force of the main message: close the camps. We witnessed a reversion towards transitory solutions, which privileged so called 'emergency' solutions'.

The 'Progetto Regionale Rom', one of the solutions explored in the chapter, is to some extent the culmination of the long battle for the closure of camps, and it encapsulates, simultaneously, the positive sides as well as the contradictions of this long-term political commitment.

CHAPTER EIGHT. VENICE AND FLORENCE: SOME COMPARATIVE NOTES

Introduction

One of the aims of my research is to explore how the 'Gypsy problem' is governed locally, in particular in relation to the arrival of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali forced migrants. Chapters 6 and 7 have analysed the cases of Venice and Florence respectively, and this chapter offers some comparative reflections. The main foci are public discourses, policies and practices concerning the Roma population settled in the two cities. Attention is paid in particular to the way the idea of camps for housing Roma emerged, how it was negotiated among different institutional and non-institutional actors, and how it was successively contested, leading in both cities to initiatives aimed at closing down authorised camps.

Grounds for comparison

To focus on the city scale, rather than excluding other instances of multilevel governance which characterise this complex policy issue, has offered a stage from which to observe the different processes and dynamics taking place and to *study through* them (see chapter 3 for thorough discussion of the methodology).

The city has provided the geographic and political terrain of investigation, a terrain that sometimes exceeds the administrative borders of the municipality in exam, and at times gets fragmented through the involvement of sub-municipality authorities.

As research on migrants' integration in the Italian context has shown, during the 1990s, local authorities played an important role in this domain, promoting different, and sometimes diverging, policies, in the absence of a coherent legislative framework at the national level (see Zincone 1999; Zincone and Caponio 2005; Koff 2003; Campomori 2005; Mantovan 2007). In a comparative study of public discourse and policy making on migration in three Italian cities, Caponio (2006) argues for research on migration issues to take into account the local scale of policy making and implementation, and points out the limits of an approach restricted to

macro-institutional variables that fails to acknowledge the complexity of the policy process and its impact on the social integration of immigrants.

In the 1990s, Florence and Venice were at the forefront of the development of policy for the social inclusion of migrants and refugees. However, the parallel between these two cities goes well beyond this aspect. Both cities were governed by left-led political coalitions and both hold long traditions of progressive politics, although they are located in two regions, Tuscany and Veneto, with very different political histories. Tuscany, in fact, belongs (together with Umbria and Emilia Romagna), to the so-called 'regioni rosse' [red regions] where the electoral stronghold of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) during most of the twentieth century was situated; Veneto, instead, is a mainly rightwing region with a strong conservative Catholic identity⁹⁷.

Venice and Florence are demographically of comparable size and similar socio-economic profile; they are both regional capitals, of Tuscany and Veneto respectively; both local authorities were at the forefront in the reception of displaced persons during the Balkan wars; and they, more than other cities in Italy, developed and implemented locally, forms of support and assistance for refugees and, as part of this process, contributed actively in the creation of what became the first network of cities offering shelter to refugees in Italy at a time when, at the national level, there was very little attention, if not a strategy, in dealing with refugees. Moreover, the two cities hosted a sizeable population of foreign Roma from the Balkans; in both cities, there were some nomad camps pre-existing to the 1990s Balkan wars, to which was inevitably attached a public discourse on 'Gypsies'; more importantly, in both cities, the idea of nomad camps as a just housing solution for foreign Roma has been, much earlier than in other cities, put under question and policies to go beyond camps have been put forward and, at least in part, implemented.

⁹⁷ See Del Medico (2004) for a thorough analysis of the spectrum of extreme-right political organisations in Veneto.

This chapter aims to highlight some commonalities and differences in the way the local authorities of Florence and Venice engaged with the Roma and governed their presence between the late 1980s and early 2000s. Echoing the structure of chapter 6 and 7, the analysis will focus on issues of discourse, politics and policy before and after the arrival of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali in the late 1990s, focusing in particular on the process of institutionalisation of the Roma, the different roles of institutional and non-institutional actors and the emergence and consolidation of alternatives to nomad camps.

The 'discovery' of the Roma

The arrival of Yugoslavian Roma first and later of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali did not happen in a void. It occurred in places which, despite perhaps not having a previous significant presence of Roma, had, nonetheless, their own set of ideas and stereotypes around 'the Gypsies'. Moreover, these arrivals happened in specific policy regimes, defined by administrative decentralisation, an underdeveloped asylum system, and regional legislation developed during the 1980s to deal with the presence of Italian Roma and Sinti families, and in localities with specific political cultures. To take this set of circumstances into account is crucial in order to be able to interpret the developments in the two cities.

The regional law in Veneto – 'Measures to safeguard Romani culture' (no. 38/1984), later amended by the 1989 'Measures to safeguard Romani and Sinti culture' (no. 54/1989) - predates the arrival of the first numerically significant flow of Yugoslavian Roma, and it was aimed at long established Italian Sinti communities. It has as its primary aim the protection of the right to a nomadic lifestyle. Instead, in Tuscany, the first regional law is the result of the public and political debate triggered by the emersion of the Roma on the public arena at the end of the 1980s, at the time of the arrival of the Yugoslavian Roma. Nonetheless, the first regional law is still immersed in the nomadic frame, and only gradually the official discourse on Roma in Tuscany moved away from this frame, under the pressure of the effective lobbying of local activists and think tanks (i.e. Fondazione Michelucci, see Sigona 2001; Picker 2008).

Notwithstanding the importance of the historical and cultural backgrounds of the regional legislation for Roma and Sinti mentioned above, there is a more general political factor that explains the diverging trajectories of Venice and Florence as far as the relationship with the regional authorities are concerned. Venice - politically, culturally and even morphologically, is like an island in Veneto, located at the margin of the wealthier industrial district, has a progressive political history, by contrast to the rest of the region, which is largely governed by a coalition of rightwing groups (including ultraconservative Catholics, Forza Italia neoliberals, post-fascist nostalgics, and Northern League anti-immigrant campaigners). Florence, by contrast, is at the core of the cultural, economic and political life of Tuscany, and the region, one of the regions of the so-called 'red belt' of Italy, and historically has a distinctive progressive political orientation. As a result of this, the Florence local government contributes actively to the region-wide political debate and works in partnership with the regional authority on several political initiatives. Venice, on the contrary, cannot rely on a similar political and financial support, and tends, instead, to develop its own policy as much as possible independently or, as in the case of the arrival of Yugoslavian displaced migrants, in collaboration with the central government (especially at times when this was led by centre-left coalitions, namely Romano Prodi 1996-1998; Massimo D'Alema 1998-2000). One of the results of this 'isolation' is that in Venice, the discourse on Roma is largely city-based, with little reference to the regional framework.

As we have seen, camps are a central feature of the debate around the Roma in both cities. The process of recognition of the inhabitants of informal settlements, and the creation of authorised camps, followed a similar path in Florence and Venice. However, the link between camps and discourses about a nomadic lifestyle, while present in both cities, appears stronger in Florence. In Venice, where the Roma issue emerged later, the discursive and policy frame on Roma was since the beginning more connected to that on 'refugees' and, until very recently, when the Northern League tried to capitalise on the local authority's proposal to regenerate and refurbish the nomad camp in via Vallenari (see the conclusion of chapter 6), the Italian Sinti and the Yugoslav Roma were separate in the political discourse.

Interestingly, camps in Venice became 'refugee camps' in the political discourse. In Florence this never happened, despite the fact that the camps became de facto the main pole of attraction for Yugoslav Roma escaping from war and economic and political instability.

A common feature of the two cities is that initiatives towards the Roma tend to be framed and justified as temporary responses to emergency situations. This problem framing also has important practical implications for the definition of solutions, as well as in the procrastination of precariousness, a key feature of Roma everyday lives in Italy. As explained by a social worker in Florence:

This is a recurring feature over the years, this means that even if you implement a project that produces good results, the problem is that the politicians want quick-fix responses and projects like this do not provide this kind of results, at least not in the short term. But politicians can't wait, hence it becomes over and over again an emergency situation and they ask people like me to solve this emergency. But when you tell them that after the emergency, there are several other steps, everyday hard work, to do, they just don't want to hear it, because for them there is no political return (author's interview, 2006).

As the analysis has shown, this temporariness is engrained in the way the Roma presence is governed. It is embedded in the very physical structure of camps, with their rows of caravans, with the containers with the identification number badly painted on the door and the expiration date stamped on the certificate of habitability. But, despite all this, these temporary solutions have lasted far longer than was initially anticipated, and thousands of children were born and grew up in camps which were meant to be there only for the time needed to find better housing solutions. Moreover, the 'chain of temporary solutions' which govern the Roma presence, by fostering social exclusion and marginalisation, becomes itself a cause, and a justification, for the emergency discourse, in other words a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Health hazard, both for camp residents and local inhabitants, extreme marginalization, with a particular emphasis on the conditions of children, and its impact, often implicit in policy statements, on crime and security are central to the

framing of the local government initiatives for the Roma in Venice and Florence, and represented an inspiration for many centre-left local authorities in Italy (Brunello 1996).⁹⁸

The discourse of 'emergency' serves two main purposes: to mobilize support among voters, or at least avoid opposition, and to justify the use of public resources for an 'undeserving' category of people.

Opposition from local residents to any attempts by local authorities to relocate the Roma in new areas, unless completely isolated, is a shared feature in Venice and Florence, as are occasional manifestations of anger and conflict in neighbourhoods where settlements are already located.

In addition to this, we need to take into account the role of opportunist politicians who try to not only capitalise on local residents' anger towards Roma, but also to broaden the issue beyond the specific area where the conflict is happening.

On the opposite side, local authorities try to manage conflict by resorting, for example, to the 'emergency' discourse and stressing the temporariness of solutions. These should be understood as a component of the articulated set of responses developed over the years in response to specific circumstances or more established situations. Two main trends can be detected, namely the devolution of the responsibility over the nomad camps to borough authorities; and the displacement and replacement of the 'problem' outside the main cities. As for the first trend, it can be observed that both cities transferred the responsibility over the Roma issue to their administrative sub-articulations, opting for a micro-territorialisation of conflict⁹⁹. This approach helped local authorities to confine the 'Gypsy problem' to specific territories and minimise the impact of new settlements which were located in the same territories where previous camps were located (i.e. the new villages in

⁹⁸ In centre-right local authorities, the issue of security is dominant, although children's marginality is also important – this can be seen as a necessary concession to the dominant catholic ethos of the country. Nonetheless, the attention to Romani children tends to emphasise issues like bad parenting, and children's exploitation and slavery.

⁹⁹ this was more noticeable in Florence, although Venice also transferred important tasks to its mainland alter ego, Mestre.

Florence, the refurbishment of the camp of via Vallenari in Venice) The second trend goes in the opposite direction, displacing and replacing the 'problem' outside the urban borders. This strategy has been pursued in different ways: by getting the central government, mainly through the local prefecture, to take responsibility for the resettlement of refugees and humanitarian cases; by resettling Romani families, using local authorities or regional funding and the third sector to rent or buy houses for them on the private market; or by relocating individual families into council flats in increasingly multiethnic council housing estates where the Roma, as a group, become invisible to the public gaze.

The arrivals from Kosovo in 1999

During the 1990s, the local authorities of Florence and Venice had undertaken several initiatives to get other municipalities to contribute to the reception of Romani families. These attempts encountered harsh opposition, and often caused tensions between different local and state authorities, as vividly described in the following extract from an interview with a social worker in Florence:

The prefect, let's put it this way, was a little bit annoyed with the Florence local government. At that time, there was a line which was often heard in his office: 'enough is enough; Florence creates troubles and then wants to pass them onto others. I am not the prefect of Florence. I am the prefect of the province of Florence, therefore I am not here to take the problem away from you and pass it onto another municipality nearby' (author's interview, 2006).

At the end of the 1990s, the arrival of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali brought the 'Roma issue' back into the spotlight in Italy. Florence and Venice with their camps became an important destination for incoming flows of refugees. Family and kinship networks played an important role in drawing the map of Italian 'informal' asylum reception facilities. The camps' population increased significantly, and the infrastructures deteriorated quickly. The lack of a nationwide asylum reception system once again became apparent. Municipalities under pressure from the new arrivals, NGOs and church organisations, created a partnership and set up a network of assistance called 'Azione Comune'. This project became the blueprint for the first

government funded asylum reception system, the National Asylum Programme (see chapter 4).

However, when the refugee inflow lost its 'emergency' framing, the situation changed rapidly. Florence had emphasised the humanitarian character of the resettlement, and when the situation changed, the support from other municipalities quickly vanished. It became clear that it was Roma that they wanted to resettle.

Florence and Venice responded to this situation by developing two resettlement programmes specifically targeted at Yugoslavian Roma. In Venice, the local authority commissioned a third sector cooperative (Caracol) to develop a project aimed at the closure of two camps (San Giuliano and Zelarino). The Mila project included an assessment of the housing needs and legal status of camps' inhabitants, and a plan for the resettlement of the Romani families. It was implemented through a range of different housing solutions, including access to council flats and dispersal in the region, or even outside the region. The Progetto Regionale Rom in Tuscany was developed with a similar aim in mind, although the target group was more specific, including only those families who had not found accommodation through the mainstream council housing programme, and who could not be accommodated in the so-called new villages. Progetto Regionale Rom, hence, does not cover the whole Romani population of the camps, and was developed as a component of a broader strategy for the closure of camps.

The use of third sector agencies as mediators in 'private market' transactions is common to both projects. The recourse to non-institutional actors to streamline the implementation of decision making, limit bureaucratic obstacles, and by-pass time-consuming mediations with other local authorities proved successful as far as the relocations of families is concerned, although less so in relation to the support for the integration of Roma in the new localities.

Venice and Florence, after several failed attempts in the 1990s, managed to bypass the opposition of other local authorities by supporting the relocation of Romani families through the 'market route'. Initially, Florence tried a more institutional and negotiated approach, by getting the regional authority involved and relying on what

was assumed to be a more supportive political environment. However, the diplomatic route proved full of obstacles and the implementation agencies had to opt for a more market-based approach. A senior civil servant in Florence offers her view on this:

Florence local authority might not even have notified its decisions to the regional authority. This may be wrong; however, if I rent a house I don't need to ask anyone for permission. This is a form of discrimination among citizens (author's interview, 2005).

However, while in Venice the strategic decision was taken to privilege the purchase of properties for those who did not find a place in council flats, and the local authority funding went towards the payment of advances on mortgages; in Florence, this approach was deemed economically unsustainable and political risky. In Tuscany, the implementation agencies therefore operated on the real estate market, renting properties in affordable towns and sub-renting them to Romani families, and in this way bypassing the kind of discrimination Caracol had encountered in Veneto for renting houses.

There are some important differences to point out here as far as the implementation of the projects is concerned.

The first and more substantial point is that Caracol managed, in a relatively short period of time, to relocate all camp residents, and both camps were closed down. In Florence, instead, the approach taken by the local authority meant that the camps continued to exist while they were gradually emptied, incurring the risk of continuing to attract new arrivals and family reunifications. Nowadays, the only camp left in Venice is inhabited by Italian Sinti and Roma (via Vallenari), who prefer to live in light housing structures at close contact with other community members. Instead, in Florence, despite a number of families having access to council flats and several others being resettled outside town, in the place where the Poderaccio camp used to be, there are now two new but still temporary 'villages', and the Olmatello camp is still where it was created over twenty years ago as a response to an emergency. The following quote from a young Romani interviewee in Florence illustrates the disillusionment of the inhabitants of the 'new villages':

I can assure you, it will last six, seven, even ten years. The Masini camp lasted twenty years!

Second, while ARCI, one of the main implementation partners in Tuscany, could rely on an extensive network of local branches around Tuscany, and a long experience of resettlement programmes for Yugoslavian refugees, Caracol had a more limited network and no previous experience of resettlement.

Third, the Venice local authority and Caracol agreed that most of the project resources would be allocated to pay advances for mortgages, and as a consequence, almost no resources were allocated to assist integration and settlement of resettled families. After a short period of transition, resettled families were 'abandoned' by Caracol and Venice social services. The Florentine 'Progetto Regionale Rom', instead, followed the opposite approach. It allocates a significant amount of resources to assistance and integration programmes, which lasts up to two-three years. A civil servant in Florence explains why using public funding for assisting Roma to buy properties was 'unsustainable':

In Florence there were 1200 people, thus this option was unsustainable. I am a civil servant and a citizen, my role is to make acceptable proposals. I must take into account what another citizen like me could think. This is what a good civil servant does (author's interview, 2006).

This argument was echoed by other interviewees. However, I would argue that the decision to privilege renting and longer periods of assistance instead of buying properties and autonomy also has systemic roots, taking us back to the different political cultures of the two regions and, importantly, to different models of 'progressive' governance¹⁰⁰. In Tuscany, the third sector and the regional political leadership are strongly interlinked. Local and regional authorities work in close cooperation with the main regional third sector agencies and fund their activities. In the case of the Progetto Regionale Rom, this meant, I would argue, the privileging of long term assistance over the autonomy of 'beneficiaries'.

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of the governance of the Roma issue in another 'progressive' city, see Però 1999.

My analysis of the case studies has also shown how rights and entitlements for camp residents are connected to their length of stay in Venice and Florence, sometimes in parallel with or despite their legal status in Italy, and how these entitlements, an expression of the 'localism of rights' (Zincone 1994), created a set of obligations in local authorities which overlap and sometimes conflict with other set of obligations derived, for example, by the national legislation on asylum. These dynamics were observed in a number of instances also during the implementation of the initiatives towards the closure of camps. In chapter 10, I will look at camps and what I term the 'comfort of exceptionality' in further detail, also exploring the impact of dispersal on the sort of rights and entitlements produced by the camp.

Conclusion

The cases of Venice and Florence illustrate the complexity of the relationship between labelling, policy making and implementation. The analysis has revealed how negotiation and contestation over the labelling of newcomers has been an ongoing process, with important policy and practice implications.

In Venice and Florence alike, the conflict over names has surfaced several times over the years, especially in correspondence to the arrival of displaced people from Yugoslavia. To an initial refusal by the authorities (or some of them) to apply the provision of existing legislation regarding the protection of displaced people from former Yugoslavia to the Roma, on the ground that the Roma were 'nomads'¹⁰¹, the mobilisation of some activists, social workers and sympathetic politicians persuaded the authorities to recognise the Roma as people in need of humanitarian protection.

As a local politician in Venice pointed out, to 'reiterate continuously the idea that they were war victims' was a central part of the work of the Venice local authority.

¹⁰¹ As if these labels were mutually exclusive and being a 'nomad' was by itself sufficient to justify their exclusion from any forms of protection.

This was intended to create a more positive momentum around its initiative for the Roma population, as well as repositioning them towards other institutions.

Censuses and quotas are important instruments with which the local authorities tried to govern the presence of the Roma on their territory, and had a central role in determining the entitlements and rights of Romani residents. The 1994 census was particularly important because it was conducted by a national agency (the Italian Refugee Council) and its impacts went beyond the localities, as the allocation of national funding for war displaced people from the war in Yugoslavia was at stake (law n. 390/1992). A consequence of the census was the consolidation of the distinction between 'historical' Roma and displaced Romani people, which determined which authority was in charge for them.

Finally, the analysis of the case studies has revealed not only the coexistence of different institutional and political agendas regarding the Roma, but also underlying tensions in the institutional structure of Italy, in which several territorial articulations coexist. Regions, provinces, municipalities, borough councils, prefectures and river authorities all form a growing web of political, administrative and specialised institutions, 'born out of successive moments of delimitation, through which emerging instances seem to coagulate' (Galluccio 2002: 255), which engage with each other following 'a variable geometry' (Coppola 1997), where bureaucratic labelling matters in so far as it may make an individual, group or issue visible, and on what terms, to the 'gaze' of the institution in object.

PART IV. ETHNOGRAPHIC GAZE

Through an analysis of the accounts of 'street level bureaucrats' and their 'clients' in Venice and Florence, Part 4 focuses on the visions, practice, and agency of social actors involved in the 'Gypsy problem'. It explores the room for manoeuvre of social actors within the framework of discourse and policy on 'nomads' and 'refugees'. Finally, it examines the everyday life in/of camps and the processes of adaptation and adjustment of residents to the 'exceptionality' of the camp.

CHAPTER NINE: THE AGENCY OF SOCIAL ACTORS

Introduction

While Quartiere 4 sent a civil servant to our country to see first-hand how we used to live there, at Quartiere 5, instead, they look at you top-down – for them you are only a Gypsy, they don't look at you as a human being (Rom, M, Florence).

This account captures two important themes of my research: the relevance of the local dimension in the governance of the Romani population and the coexistence of different institutional approaches and agendas even in the same municipality; and the Roma's perception of the state, and state bureaucracy, and its actions.

The theoretical background to this investigation is discussed in chapter 2, in particular in the section 'The subject as a social actor', in which I explored the room for manoeuvre of social actors *vis-à-vis* state officials and bureaucrats, as well as the agency of state officials and bureaucrats in the policy process.

The analysis of the case studies in Part 3 has showed how rights and entitlements for Roma and Ashkali are located on a terrain open to negotiation and contestation from conflicting parties, where labelling and framing become a crucial element of the political battle. The politics of signification, Benford and Snow argue, embroils 'all actors within the collective action arena who engage in this reality construction work' (Benford and Snow 2000:625). In this chapter, I will explore another aspect, moving away from the focus on the institutional arrangements governing the 'Gypsy problem' in the two case studies, to looking across the case studies, to the actual actors and interactions involved in this complex political and policy arena, and exploring the relationship between the visions, assumptions, and everyday practices of civil servants, social workers, third sector employees, and activists, and to the ways in which the local Roma deal with, and respond to, and/or adjust to them.

Bureaucratic identities, on the one hand, construct and shape the subject of their action, creating in Herzfeld's words (1992: 80) 'self-fulfilling prophecies'; and on the other, define the political and geographical spaces within which the subject – in my case Roma and Ashkali forced migrants – can live, operate and mobilise, in a

process that is never ending and always unstable (see Schaffer 1984; Zetter 1985, 1991, 2007; Sigona 2003). Drawing on the narratives of Somali and Bosnian refugees, civil servants, and social workers in Sweden, Cederberg (2005, 2006) shows how perceptions of 'others' are institutionalised in everyday bureaucratic practices, channelling relationships and opportunities in specific ways and determining access and life chances for the 'beneficiaries' (cf. Essed 1991; Essed et al. 2004).

Foucault's concept of governmentality provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding how the state apparatus operates. In my work, I draw in particular on two aspects of the concept: first, the state is not a discrete, monolithic and static entity. The state, Feldman argues (Feldman 2005: 220), 'only exists insofar as actions are conducted in its name'. It is, therefore, a coalition of forces and processes, of multiple centres of powers, 'bundles of everyday institutions and forms of rule' (Corbridge et al. 2005: 5). Second, the exploration of institutions, for example nomad camps, cannot be detached from an analysis of the processes of subjectification which underpin them.

In this chapter I will focus in particular on the first aspect, while the next chapter is devoted to an investigation of the complex relationship between nomad camps and the 'nomads'.

Through the narratives of interviewees I will now look at 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1980) and explore the impact of their visions, attitudes, motivations, and agendas on the way they carry out their roles and tasks, and examine how Roma and Ashkali adapt, adjust, and respond to them.

Visions, policy, and practice

I hope in the future we will succeed in changing how people see Roma (Rom, M, Florence).

Adapting Benford and Snow's conceptualisation of frames and framing processes (2000) in his investigation of the ways in which governments and activists frame the 'Roma issue' in central and eastern Europe, Vermeersch (2006: 150-183) focuses on two key framing tasks performed by state actors and Roma organisations: identity

framing, and problem framing. The first task concerns the definition of the target population and its core features, which make it distinguishable from other groups. Labelling plays an important role in this task. The second task is closely linked to the concept of 'problem definition' discussed in policy studies (see chapter 2), but it is applied also to non policy makers. However, as Vermeersch (2006) points out, the distinction between the two framing tasks, while analytically valid, tends to be blurred in policy documents and interviewees' accounts; moreover, he notices that problem descriptions in official documents are usually rather general, implicit, and vague; and problem frames are time and circumstance specific and subject to change¹⁰².

The focus of this section is twofold. Firstly, I intend to explore street-level bureaucrats and activists' visions of the Roma and their circumstances, how they relate to mainstream and official discourses and policy on Roma, and the relationship between cause and effect in their narratives, and show the impact of these visions on their everyday practice. Secondly, I will show to what extent and in what ways Romani interviewees engage with and adapt to these frames.

Through the eyes of social workers

For Lipsky (1980), an irreconcilable duality defines the experience of front-line workers working in-between the needs of their clients and the need to adjust their practice to changing policies, which makes them 'frequently embroiled in conflicts of values, goals, purposes and interests' (Schön 1983: 17).

My research shows how this tension is built into the role of the social workers and other front line bureaucrats I interviewed, and is something that they have to confront on an everyday basis. The distance that exists between official policy principles and actual actions is captured in the following quote, in which a city

¹⁰² While Vermeersch's work (2006) takes as a unit for comparison the state, my research instead emphasises the need for rescaling the analysis and paying closer attention to how specific localities and local polities problematise and manage the 'Roma issue'; how, in each locality, different institutional and non-institutional actors do not necessarily share the same agenda but rather compete over the labelling and framing of the 'Roma issue'; and how national, regional and local frames compete over the same territory and target group.

councillor in Florence offers as an example the two new 'villages' the local government has built, despite its official policy of 'closing down camps' and says:

There is a big distance between some ideals and principles put forward by the local government and what we witness in everyday practice, which seems to follow a different agenda (city councillor, F, Florence).

Moreover, as the following account emphasises, new politicians – especially local councillors for social affairs to whom the 'Gypsy issue' tend to be assigned - bring their own agenda and priorities even if the official policy may stay the same.

Do you really think that the Left Democratic Party [the largest party in local government] is more open to Roma than other parties? I believe it is all about individuals. Welcoming Roma is, of course, a leftwing policy, but you have to see who is in charge of it. I never underestimate the importance of individual personalities (senior civil servant, F, Florence).

For a front-line social worker in Venice, the ambiguity of the politicians' handling of Roma and the internal conflicts within the local government over the Roma issue are causes for disillusionment and distress, as she explains below:

[The Roma issue] is an area full of conflicts and ambiguities, even internal to the ruling coalition. I have witnessed them over many years. Personally, to see this dark side of politics has been very painful and has plunged me into a political crisis (social worker, F, Venice).

As discussed earlier in relation to nomad camps (see chapters 4 and 5), the dominant political discourse on Roma and Sinti in Italy, which emerges for example in the regional laws 'to safeguard Roma/Gypsy/nomadic culture', is centred around the idea of them as an ethnic minority characterized historically by a nomadic lifestyle. In the regional laws, 'culture' is employed to justify the segregation of Roma in confined spaces (Piasere 1991, 1999; Brunello 1996; Sigona 2002; 2005; Picker 2008).

My analysis has shown how the nomadic discursive frame is articulated in Tuscany, where the link between nomad camps and nomadic lifestyle was at the core of the first regional law ('Measures for Roma and Sinti peoples', n. 17/1988). This persists in the second (n.73/1995) and third (n.2/2000) regional laws, despite some

important amendments which introduced a variety of different housing solutions and a more nuanced idea of Romani culture (cf. Picker 2008).

In Venice, for a number of political and historical reasons, the regional policy framework and discourse on Roma and Sinti is less relevant and, to many extents, Venice city council operates in this area following its own agenda. In the 1990s and early 2000s this meant addressing the arrival of Yugoslavian Roma within the 'refugee' discursive and policy frame, rather than in the 'nomadic' one. However, despite the efforts of the progressive local government to create support around the newly arrived 'refugees', this frame remained contested, as explained in the following quote:

The saga of the 'nomadic Gypsies' versus the 'war refugees' has been going on for years; even now I believe it hasn't been completely digested (civil servant, F, Venice).

However, the different framing strategy championed in Venice failed to accompany the dispersed Romani families, who were resettled in towns and villages with little or no direct or practical knowledge of these communities, and thus rapidly turned to a culturalist framework to interpret and address the newcomers and inform their practice.

The nomadic discursive framework provides the main interpretative schemata for explaining the circumstances of the Romani population. The dominant frame defines the boundaries of the *conversation* in which the various actors engage from different standpoints, and with different levels of power to challenge, question, or reaffirm the frame. A social worker offers an insight into her everyday work in which she has to engage with other actors' visions of the Roma within the very same institution.

Overall, the municipality of Florence has a correct approach to the Roma, but there is still someone who believes that the Roma are only those who play the violin and deal with horses (senior social worker, F, Florence).

Similarly, an activist explains:

Florence abounds with romantic spirits who would love Roma to be like historical monuments (activist, M, Florence).

The previous quotes echoes what was said earlier in Chapter 4 regarding the idea of 'culture' as a set of uses and customs unrelated to the material conditions that produced them, and unaffected by the passing of time that dominates the regional laws. A local researcher captures the ambiguity of the dominant culturalist discourse in Florence:

What it really means is that they are incapable of change; unable to manage their resources and their culture (researcher, M, Florence).

In discussing their work and the kind of issues they have to deal with, some social workers and civil servants explain a number of circumstances and behaviours of the Romani clients through a culturalist lens. The first two interviewees are based in Rovigo and their encounter with the Roma is recent, being the result of the dispersal programme of the Venice local authority.

The man is the one who stays at home and manages the household. The wife goes out to beg. Children don't seem to take any responsibility for supporting the family (civil servant, F, Rovigo)

The house was not really clean and tidy, because evidently they are not really accustomed to manage a house as we expect (social worker, F, Rovigo).

When one of our Romani clients got the council flat in Venice, a Venetian lady gave her the furniture, everything, she didn't even have to buy a broom. I know this because I was there, I carried her stuff to the lift. At the end of the move, the Romani client said: 'but I worked hard', to which I replied: 'your work was to take home this stuff that we loaded on the lorry', she didn't even do the shopping before moving in (social worker, F, Venice).

From the perspective of social workers, a crucial issue is the relationship between the clients and the social services, which some interviewees characterise as a chronic quest for help.

I came to realize that they have a tendency to seek help, to ask and ask all the time, to complain that they don't own anything; that no one wants to help them. This is something that sometimes annoys me (case worker, F, Rovigo).

If it was for them, they would be here every day. At some point, we had to tell them that our manager had forbidden us to see them outside the designated office hours.

So they began to phone instead (social worker, F, Venice).

There is an embedded ambiguity in the culturalist discourse, and it concerns the meaning of 'culture' and the extent to which it is something to value or change. This poses some difficult questions not only to policy makers, when they define the culture of these communities, or some aspects of it, as worth 'safeguarding', but also among practitioners who engage with Romani individuals on a day-to-day basis. A civil servant in Venice illustrates this point when reflecting upon her involvement in setting up and implementing the dispersal programme:

A big question we have been asking ourselves is: was it right to force them to do this? I mean, what does it mean, respect for other cultures? This is a dilemma we face all the times, when you deal with cultural diversity, you sometimes encounter situations that are unacceptable (civil servant, F, Venice).

The examples provided by the interviewees show how the culturalist perspective can lead to different practices towards the Roma among different actors. For example, the social worker in Rovigo who thought that the Roma were unable to manage and take care of their houses decided to set up a support scheme for Romani women dispersed in her catchment area:

At the beginning there was a caseworker who went with them to the supermarket to make sure that they use our vouchers to buy what was useful to them (social worker, F, Rovigo).

A senior social worker in Florence observes how under the banner of respect for cultural differences, state institutions may sometimes justify behaviours or interpret episodes and circumstances in a way that causes harm to members of the Roma community.

There is a kind of educated racism in many institutions, starting from the Juvenile Justice Court and the ordinary Justice Court when they state that violence against women at home is a cultural trait of this population, or when they tolerate abuses against children for the same reason (social worker, F, Florence).

This observation is interesting also because it confirms previous research that stresses the weak position of the Roma, and those perceived as Roma, in the Italian judicial system (Simoni 2005). For Governatori (2000), a magistrate herself,

stereotypes about the 'Gypsies' influence judges and their decisions, and this further reinforces stereotypes in society (cf. Tosi Cambini 2008)¹⁰³. A Romani interviewee offers another example of the impact of stereotypes on the way state actors operate,

When my daughter-in-law and my blue-eyed grandson arrived from Kosovo to join us in Florence, a police officer wanted to take my grandson away from her because he believed he had been kidnapped by the Gypsies (Rom, M, Florence).

However, it should be pointed out that, while in the example above and in Simoni's and Governatori's work, the reasons for the discriminatory treatment of the Roma are long established prejudices against them (for example, the alleged attitude to domestic violence or kidnapping children), the institutional form of discrimination mentioned by the social worker is more subtle and is legitimised within what it is meant to be a positive aim of safeguarding Romani culture.

Returning to street-level bureaucrats, the culturalist perspective provides social workers and civil servants with a reassuring framework for engaging with the 'otherness' of the Roma, and provides a comforting explanation for policy failures, as the following quotes illustrate. A social worker in Florence explains what she has learned from working with Roma:

With Roma, you have to learn to make do with little steps, because if you think of going there and changing everything, you end up with the opposite result (social worker, F, Florence).

By contrast, in the quote below, a 'reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983) explains why the use of the culturalist frame supplies a convenient framework not only for individual bureaucrats, but also at an institutional level.

If I explain a specific event or situation as a cultural trait or a cultural product, I take away from me and the majority society the responsibility for it (social worker, M, Venice).

¹⁰³ According to Governatori (2000), stereotypes can have an influence on the judges' decisions in different moments of the trial, for example as parameters for the evaluation of events, or through the assumption that all Roma act in the same way.

Moreover, he also reflects upon the impact of this approach on the relationship between social worker and client.

This kind of approach enables us to build a top-down relationship with the client. We are not on the same level. I call myself out of the game. I'm not responsible for your circumstances. We are in a very unbalanced power relation (social worker, M, Venice).

It is an approach hard to deconstruct as it fulfils its own assumptions by limiting the institutional gaze only to those Roma who meet its criteria, mostly those who live in nomad camps and rely on social services, as the following quote illustrates,

They only want to see Roma who ride horses, play the violin or even beg. If they don't do it, because they moved out the camp, live in an apartment and have an ordinary job, they say they have lost their culture (activist, M, Florence).

The selective gaze of institutions, by excluding some components of the Romani population and overexposing others, produces (and reproduces) the stereotypical image of the community. It also reveals a superimposition in public policy, and public perception, of social marginality and cultural identity.

In *Bury me standing* (1995: 238), Fonseca notices as similar phenomenon:

The more exotic Gypsies appear to be, the more 'genuine' they are considered and, paradoxically, the more acceptable they become (in the local imagination, if not in the local pub). Whoever best fits the stereotypes wins (Fonseca 1995: 238).

Finally, a social worker in Venice explains the role of the camp as a locus of social services' intervention in reproducing the dominant assumption of a Romani culture as a homogeneous and fixed entity. He argues for the development of services and initiatives outside the camp as essential for reframing the approach to these communities. This is mirrored, although with reservation, in the second quote by a Rom now living in one of the new villages in Florence.

What we have learned is that the camp doesn't exist as a community. Refusing to take the camp as a starting point for our action means to reject an ideology that assumes the lives of Roma as impermeable to change, that cultural principles are unquestionable (social worker, M, Venice).

Now we are integrating because people don't look at us any more as Gypsies. Our children are happy because they don't feel different from the other children now. Even though some Italian parents and a few teachers may not think so (Rom, M, Florence).

Dealing with the (more powerful) visions of others

In this section I investigate the extent to which, and in what ways, Romani interviewees engage with and adapt to the dominant discourse on 'Gypsies/nomads'. I will explore issues of visibility and invisibility from the perspectives of ordinary Roma and Ashkali and Romani activists.

Adapting and resisting

Often, the visions, stereotypes, and prejudices of others - of the majority in society, social workers, and activists - surface in the narratives of Romani interviewees (cf. Spinelli 1996). They can hardly be ignored as they play such an important role in the lives of the interviewees. For a Romani woman,

Nowadays, what I find very painful is that people don't recognise us for what we are, there are always prejudices before us. Despite this, I'm not ashamed to say who I am (Rom, F, Florence).

A Romani migrant from Macedonia explains his frustration about the labels and negative stereotypes attached to Roma that met him as soon as he landed in Italy, making it impossible for him to be acknowledged as what he was: a refugee.

When the horrific Balkan war started we fled to Italy where, differently from other peoples, we couldn't be refugees, but only Gypsies and nomads, only a threat (Rom, M, Pisa).

Sometimes, these visions are spelled out and explicitly contested. In the following quotes, two Roma challenge stereotypes of the Roma as being thieves and being dirty: in the first case, by contrasting the differential treatment Roma receive in comparison with Italians (noteworthy here is the role of social workers portrayed as executors of the unfair will of the state), and in second case, by refusing generalisations regarding the poor standards of hygiene, recalling that for a long time in the nomad camps people had to survive without running water. In the third

account, an interviewee refers to a documentary produced by Caracol to document the situation of the Romani minorities in Kosovo after the war, and uses it as an example of best practice to challenge the 'nomadic myth'.

They pasted the label 'thief' on us. I don't want to insult the Italians but, to be honest, they are the first to steal, beat women, and not take care of the environment, for example throwing litter from the car. But the Italians are allowed to steal. They are justified. For example, of an Italian thief, they say he did it to feed his siblings. On the contrary, if it is one of us who steals, his children are taken away from social workers. This is discrimination for me (Rom, M, Florence).

People say that Gypsies, Roma, Ashkali don't like to clean themselves. On the contrary, if I don't wash myself at least twice a day, I am all stressed, I feel smelly. I'm glad that they eventually brought running water to the new houses (young Ashkali, M, Florence).

The documentary by Caracol¹⁰⁴ is important because it talks of our history in Kosovo, where our fathers and grandfathers lived and worked. This shows that our culture is not, as they say, nomadic, but we were settled, owned houses and properties, worked on the land and in factories, went to school and had a normal life like every citizen of the world (Rom, M, Florence).

Other times, the narratives are contrapuntal to the dominant discourse, as in the following quotes, in which a young Roma explains how it is possible to learn also without going to school.

If you are with a Serb, you speak Serbian, if you are with an Albanian, you speak Albanian. If I am with an Italian, I'll speak Italian. I am a Rom, but I've learned to speak these languages because I have lived with different people. So you can learn also without going to school (Rom, M, Rovigo).

Invisibility and visibility

How to respond to deep-rooted stereotypes that portray Roma as a threat to society and, more recently, even a 'threat to public and national security', as

¹⁰⁴ The first stage of the Mila project also involved a visit to Kosovo, to document the situation of the Roma living there; see chapter 6 for details.

officially sanctioned by national legislation (Sigona 2008a, 2009a; Simoni 2008a, 2008b)? This is a dilemma which Roma have to confront in their everyday lives. Invisibility has for centuries been one of the main survival strategies adopted by these communities in hostile social environments (Piasere 2004; Bravi and Sigona 2007, 2009; Vaux Defouletier 1990), and is still an important resource today as it creates opportunities otherwise denied accessible to Roma. Among interviewees, the use of 'ethnic' invisibility is relevant in particular for accessing the mainstream job market. Two young Romani interviewees give an account of their experiences:

I am lucky because my skin is white and also the way I dress helps. People don't recognise me as a Gypsy. I deceive them. They say that we are dirty, that we smell. Is this true? When I go for a job interview, when they ask me for my address, I always give my Italian boyfriend's address not that of the camp. Here in Italy, discrimination is everywhere (Rom, F, Florence).

Since the late 1990s I work for a building firm in Mestre. I live in a flat. At work they don't know I'm a Rom. (Rom, M, Venice).

By contrast, ethnic visibility can become an asset for accessing jobs such as those provided by third sector agencies subcontracted to assist Roma, or to access *ad hoc* social provisions and welfare resources. It becomes a form of everyday appropriation of dominant structures, a way of appropriating and subverting, through everyday practice, representations that institutions seek to impose upon them (de Certeau 1980[1984]).

Importantly, visibility for some Romani interviewees is part of a strategy to challenge the dominant discourse on Roma. The memory of the *Porajmos* (Hancock 1987; Bernadac 1996, Rosemberg 2000), the extermination of hundreds of thousands of Romani people in Nazi camps, is used in the following extract from a Romani activist to explain how invisibility does not always guarantee survival.

If you stay hidden all the time, even if you don't reveal your nationality to anyone to survive, at the end of the day they will find the way to screw you, just as it happened under Hitler (Rom, M, Florence)

However, there is a significant difference in the way Roma approached the issue of active political engagement in Florence and Venice. While in Florence, Romani

activism started in the early 1990s, and some organizations have been active for more than a decade (Lapov 2004; Picker 2008; Colacicchi 1996; Jenkins 2006), in Venice, partly as a response to a different governance of the 'Gypsies issue', Roma seem to privilege a different strategy, namely the economic integration into the mainstream job market, and a low profile as a community.

Romani activists' urge to mobilise comes as a response to the perceived injustice they face in society, and to the lack of recognition of Romani history and tradition. In the following account, a Romani activist illustrates his motivations for activism by clearly positioning himself against the dominant image of Roma, and in particular by contrasting the labels 'zingaro' and 'nomad' with the autonym 'Rom'.

Several motivations drove me to change my life: first, the fact of being labelled 'nomad', that is from Rom to become a 'nomad', to become a 'zingaro' with so many prejudices, mainly negative. I never thought of myself as a 'nomad' in my home country, I didn't think of me as a 'zingaro': that is dirty, tattered, and thief. That is why I decided to be actively involved for Romani rights here in Italy. I want to show to Italians that no 'zingaro' would call another Rom 'zingaro' (Rom, M, Florence).

In order to sustain such impetus to question and transform the dominant discourse on Roma ('to show to Italians that no 'zingaro' would call another Rom 'zingaro') in Florence, the local Romani population had to set up some kind of organisational structure (Lapov 2004). The initiative came from a group of educated individuals who had previous experience of activism in the former Yugoslavia. One of the Romani activists recalls the origin of 'Amalipe Romano', the main Romani NGO in Florence:

We created it [in 2000] to help Roma refugees to be heard. They wanted to speak out, to make a movement, but everyone was doing it in their own name. The local authority, the prefecture, all the institutions, they wanted an association to talk to. So we got together and founded our organisation (Rom, M, Florence).

As the principal aim was to create a Romani voice able to enter into dialogue with local institutions and majority society, the Rom who spoke Italian most fluently was chosen as a spokesperson.

In setting up the organization, the Roma were sustained by a group of local activists. One of them explains his motivation and what role non-Romani activists can play in supporting Roma rights.

We, local activists, had and can still have an important political role, but only if we are aware of the limits of our actions and avoid any colonizing tendency towards migrants' associations [...] Our aim should be to support the creation in Italy of Romani organisations which are fully independent and capable of sustaining and defending themselves, and to bring to the fore Romani voices (activist, M, Florence).

Organizing public cultural events such as photo exhibitions, music, theatre and folklore is one of the priorities of Romani activists (cf. Amalipe Romano 2000) who want to engage with majority society and transform the public perception of Roma. However, in the view of a Romani activist, local authorities, despite the official emphasis on safeguarding Romani culture, seem to overlook these initiatives.

They know that by doing these activities we can connect with the other citizens and they didn't want it, they prefer if we stay away from them (Rom, M, Florence).

This statement reveals a general trend, a tension between the official discourse on Roma and the protection of Romani culture and its implementation in practice. It confirms the distance between a static view of culture and of the Roma as 'historical monuments' (activist, M, Florence) and what should be the practice of promoting and facilitating the process of cultural production and consumption among these communities in conjunction with a recognition of them as active citizens.

But promoting Romani political participation is neither among the priorities of local authorities in Italy (Sigona 2006b) nor, as a consequence, is it a priority for those agencies of the third sector that are subcontracted to provide services to Roma. Rather, the role of these agencies seems to be to provide nomad camp residents with enough support to avoid social unrest, hence implementing an agenda that ultimately preserve the status quo (Sigona and Monasta 2006).

There seems to be a link between the noted chronic dependency on welfare benefits and this conservative agenda. Rather than an alleged genetic predisposition of Roma to rely on aid, which is the idea that seems to inform the initiatives of many institutional and quasi-institutional actors working with Roma, I

would argue it is the lack of perspective and the disillusionment which follows generations of failed promises, of temporary nomad camps which lasted far too long, that may have contributed to create among *some* Roma a tendency to claim benefits and what can seem like an inclination to passivity. With regard to social benefits, it has to be remembered that social workers only meet those Roma who claim some kind of benefits but not all Roma rely on social services. The following extract offers an insightful perspective on Romani alleged passivity and its causes.

Basically they stand still and wait for something to be done for them, because at the end of the day, to get something, even small, is however positive. This is what they are used to getting, all the time: aid without a future (activist, F, Venice).

I would argue that this passivity should be understood as an example of adaptation and of the capacity of Roma to read and adapt their livelihood strategies to the opportunity structures of the dominant society: a 'dependency' that requires a great deal of agency.

Unmapped territories

Up to the arrival of Roma, Venice didn't know immigration, hence it had never been confronted with foreign kids for example. The Roma were the first foreign children and, at first, it was a pretty traumatic encounter, because the territory was completely unprepared (social worker, F, Venice).

Taking as starting point the accounts of civil servants and social workers and their recollections of the initial encounters with the Roma, this section aims to explore the spaces of possibility and manoeuvring of front-line bureaucrats in the early stages of the institutionalisation of Roma, and how they evolved through time. It also endeavours to cast light on the kinds of contribution civil servants and social workers made to shape the trajectories of the 'Gypsy issue' in Florence and Venice, the challenges they encountered, and if and how these initial contacts have impacted on, and could anticipate, successive developments.

The interviewees are individuals who, in some cases, have worked with the Roma for over fifteen years, sometimes in a different capacity during this time, but more often in the same role. Their memories of the initial encounters, inevitably, have

embedded in them the histories of their experience and engagement with the Roma, and are shaped by them.

Recalling her first visit to the Romani settlement in Marghera (Venice), a social worker says:

I came back to my office with the strong impression that I had seen a place out of the Fifth World just a few steps away from home. I reported on what I had seen and made some suggestions on how to address the situation (social worker, F, Venice).

Of this account, I want to isolate three elements which resonate with many of the accounts collected during fieldwork: the intensity of the initial impression (i.e. 'a place out of the Fifth World'), the impetus to make suggestions to the local authority, and the importance of proximity (i.e. they are only 'a few step away from home'). In what follows, I want to pose two questions which this extract prompts; one concerning the kind of reception these suggestions were met with in the local authority, the other the link between emotions, impressions, and suggestions.

Room for manoeuvre

I will start with the link between emotions, impressions, and suggestions, and try to investigate the experiences of front-line social workers and civil servants who came into contact with the Romani population, and the policy context in which these encounters took place. A social worker at the local prefecture in Florence remembers the time she first came across displaced people from Yugoslavia, in the early 1990s.

At that time we began to witness the first arrivals from former Yugoslavia. They arrived in a spontaneous and disorganised manner, without really knowing what they were expected to do. It was at that time that we, as front-line caseworkers, found out what was possible to do in relation to asylum. In a sense, we learned about the asylum legislation together with them [...] and later many applied for asylum (social worker, F, Florence).

This extract captures the sense of novelty represented by the arrival of displaced people from Yugoslavia (not only Roma) in Italy from the perspective of a front-line state employee¹⁰⁵. The confusion of the migrants is mirrored by the confusion of the bureaucratic apparatus, which does not know how to deal with them. Conscientious social workers began to familiarise themselves with the asylum process in parallel with the inflow of displaced people. To confirm the absence of a bureaucratic tradition in this area, the social worker quoted above notices that the number of asylum applications began to increase only when the bureaucrats became familiar with the asylum legislation (cf. chapter 4 for a discussion on the asylum system in Italy).

These initial encounters happened in a not yet structured bureaucratic environment where a few *pioneers*, with vague terms of reference and no specific bureaucratic tradition to refer to, 'invented' their own ways of interacting.

Somehow, this unmapped territory had to be tamed, and tools such as censuses and surveys served this purpose (cf. Scott 1998; Kertzer and Arel 2002, Ruppert 2008). A social worker gives her reasons for conducting a census of the Romani population, saying,

At the time I tried to do a census. I used all I had at my disposal - that is a pen, a pencil and a sheet of paper. Then I went in search of help. I went to the CGIL [the largest Italian trade union] regional office where I knew there was a lawyer who specialised in migration. Together we decided that he was going to go with these people to the police headquarters to claim the application of the Law n. 390/1992 for them, namely, residence permits on humanitarian ground for everyone. Being Yugoslav citizens, this was their right, but when I had inquired at the police head office earlier through normal channels I had received a refusal. This time, with fifty people at their door and a lawyer threatening to bring the case in front of a judge in case of rejection, the residence permits were issued very swiftly.

¹⁰⁵ As mentioned earlier in the thesis, in Italy prefectures are territorial offices of the Ministry of Interior, therefore, direct emanation of the national government.

There are a number of aspects of this account worth pointing out. Some mirror what has previously been noted; for example the importance of individual motivation and initiative, and the lack of resources and clear terms of reference in which individuals operate. But it also confirms the negotiable nature of rights and entitlements which could not be accessed through 'normal channels', but which materialised 'swiftly' after a demonstration and a lawyer threatening legal action against the police. It also shows how a 'census' was employed as a tool for extending the state 'gaze' to new territories and communities, thereby forcing an initial step towards some kind of recognition by the state apparatus¹⁰⁶. Finally, there is a point to be made about alliances and allegiances: it is noteworthy that the social worker, herself a public employee, sought support from the CGIL for obtaining the enforcement of state legislation by the police – an illustration of the tensions, conflicts and differences within the state apparatus mentioned earlier (cf. chapter 2).

One of the corollaries of the taming of these unmapped territories was the consolidation of what were 'occasional' practices over time, which produced two important results: the creation of an 'expert' knowledge on the Roma within different authorities, and the formalisation and gradual closure of the spaces of intervention for pioneer bureaucrats, as the quotes below illustrate:

As a matter of fact, we are formalising now, more than ten years after we started, a significant knowledge which grew in a purely informal manner, and brings together two different approaches: one socio-pedagogic and the other legal (social worker, F, Florence).

Since 1992, when I began to work on migration, our space for manoeuvring and the rights of migrants have been reduced, not expanded. Over the years, an almost exclusively emergency-based approach has been privileged, rather than the building of any long term perspective (social worker, F, Venice).

¹⁰⁶ Censuses, however, can also be employed as tool for enhancing social control as in the case of the 2008 biometric data collection (including fingerprinting) carried out by the Italian Ministry of Interior in nomad camps (Sigona 2009a; Simoni 2008a; Simoni 2008b).

In the latter account, the process of corrosion of migrants' rights and the reduction of spaces of intervention from the point of view of front-line social workers are connected and both follow on from the consolidation of the emergency frame, which privileges short term interventions over long-term gains.

Finally, a side effect of the creation of Roma 'experts' in local institutions is the fact that mainstream services fail to develop user-friendly services for Roma and migrants, by continuously relying on the assistance of the few in-house 'experts' as noticed by one such 'expert'.

Immigrants and nomads should no longer be an exclusive domain of the Office for Migrants and Nomads: other offices should be able to deal with them by now, as these communities raise crosscutting issues. Instead, in practice we act as consultants on every issue. They are a bit lazy. They refuse to understand that nowadays migrants are a stable presence in our society and that every office should learn how to deal with them.

Human resources

Civil servants and social workers working with the Roma are few: 'the usual suspects' as an interviewee put it.

After the CIR census, a working group was set up including the prefecture, the provincial authority, Quartiere 4, and representatives of Roma and local NGOs. It may look like a long list, but we were no more than 4-5 people, the usual suspects (social worker, F, Florence).

These 'usual suspects' seem to be very committed individuals who try their best to help their clients. But, as a senior social worker I met in her office at 7.30pm after a ten hour working day ironically remarked, their commitment makes them stand out from other colleagues:

There are not many people working in this field. There are no more than a bunch of crazy people who work with the Gypsies; half of them are weirdoes (senior social worker, F, Venice).

A significant number of interviewees have been in contact with the Roma for a long time, sometimes since the early 1990s, and they have become used to working

alone and with little resources. However, sometimes the work can be particularly demanding, and people may decide to move to other departments.

When I started I was alone, after a few months a colleague joined me (social worker, F, Venice).

The point is not 'how tired I am of them', but 'how tired they are of me' (social worker, F, Florence).

We went through some very hard times. Many gave up. This is a demanding job to carry out (case worker, F, Venice).

As an example of the difficult nature of this job, a social worker recalls the case of a child who had to be taken away from his family and given up for adoption, and how hard it was to communicate this decision to his family.

It was really hard to explain to them what was happening. It was not a language problem. They simply couldn't understand it; for them if children managed to survive, then they survive. To communicate the idea that a child can sometimes survive only in certain conditions was a terrible job, terrible because they didn't get it, they didn't understand why their kid was being taken away from them (social worker, F, Venice).

This anecdote not only confirms the hardship involved in the job of a front-line social worker, but it also seems to reveal a structural, and irresolvable, tension between the individual - *the face of the state* – and the role - *the interface between the citizens/clients and the state*. With the expression 'face of the state' I intend to emphasise two elements: first, the emotional dimension and the subjectivity of the individual in the role, and, second, the way clients/citizens perceive the state via the individual officer/social worker, sometimes blurring the boundaries between them and their role. This seems particularly true when the client group is unfamiliar with the rules and hierarchies of the state apparatus (among foreign Roma in Italy, many are illiterate and come from rural areas and villages), when the rules and hierarchies themselves are unclear and open to negotiations at times, leaving significant room for discretionary practice to individuals, and when the understanding of a situation or event differs significantly due to cultural difference between the client and the state. The following complain shows this confusion between the role of the bureaucrat and the individual in the role, from the perspective of a young Ashkali.

I don't understand why she lied to us. She should have been more precise and said: 'Yes, I'll help you' and if she couldn't, 'No, I can't', that's it. Instead she said: 'Yes, let's see [what i can do for you]'. To me this sounded more like 'I'll help you', but at the end she didn't (young Ashkali, M, Florence).

The personalization, to some extent, of the relationship with clients, however, is considered by some interviewees an essential prerequisite for the success of their job. In the following account, a social worker in charge of liaising with Roma underlines the importance of building a relationship of trust with them in order for resettlement to work. In particular, she explains that it was an essential requirement to avoid being perceived of as a representative of the unwelcoming state.

What we were proposing for them to do [resettle in the region] was not simple and you could have a chance of success only if you were capable of building a relationship of trust with them. Otherwise you were seen exclusively as a representative of the Government who was there to evict them (social worker, F, Florence).

It is of no surprise then that some Romani clients began to treat social workers as 'family friends' – many mentioned invitations to weddings and christenings – or that their name may be passed on to newcomers as a guarantee of good treatment or, that finally, even after they resettle in the regions, they may still stay in touch, and ask for advice and support.

Quite a few people called me. 'You know. I don't like it here ... I'm depressed ... I have got troubles... I'd like to come back to Florence'. I tell them: 'Look, now that you've got a council flat over there, how can you expect that the local authority will give you a flat in Florence with so many people on the street?' (social worker, F, Florence).

In 1995 or 1996, a small family landed at the prefecture of Florence with a tiny piece of paper given to them at the border by another Romani family with my name scribbled on it (social worker, F, Florence).

Experiments and errors

The final theme to be explored in this chapter is a corollary to the discussion about the room for manoeuvring of civil servants and social workers, and concerns risks and possibilities produced by the fact of intervening in a relatively unstructured

bureaucratic environment. These also apply, to various degrees, to third sector actors and political activists. An activist in Florence explains how her organisation came to define their working practice.

It was a process also for us. We operated without a compass. I mean, we had no information regarding these kinds of situations. Thus, we had to learn a number of things only in the making (activist, F, Florence).

One of the important things they came to realize at a later stage was that aid *per se* does not offer any long-term solution, and that a change of assistance paradigm was needed.

Working in nomad camps, we became aware that there are rights and duties and that aid alone takes you nowhere (social worker, F, Venice).

Therefore, it is not only the knowledge, vision, or agenda of these street-level bureaucrats which should be taken into account but also, importantly, their lack of knowledge, and the consequences this can have, as illustrated by the following example:

Regarding access to citizenship, I mean the fact that at 18, those Romani kids born in Italy had one year to apply for citizenship, I believe no one of us, I include myself, managed to pass this information onto them (social worker, F, Venice),

For many social workers and civil servants, Roma refugees became a sort of pilot population – guinea pigs for experimenting new practices – and the lesson learned from this experience informed the development of new strategies and methods of intervention. This is a point worth stressing as it shed light on an aspect which is overlooked by the dominant discourse on Roma as an exception and a niche with its own rules and regulation.

Our office has learned a great deal from this experience. It enabled us to develop methodologies of intervention which we then have applied to other reception projects for refugees (social worker, F, Venice).

The novelty of the situation became an incentive to develop new working practices also for activists and NGOs. As an activist explains:

When we went to talk to the Roma for the first time we did not know much about

them and nor we knew how to interact with them. We learned through practice (activist, M, Florence).

It also pushed them to question existing stereotypes, for example the myth of nomadism. A senior representative of ARCI, the main NGO actor in Tuscany, explains the learning process which brought them to develop the 'Progetto Regionale Rom'.

The project is built on the idea that adequate housing is an essential component of social citizenship. However, at the beginning, for us, this idea was almost incredible. To think that those people, who we had seen living in horrible conditions in nomad camps, could in the short term live in a house as normal Italians was a massive challenge.

Conclusion

The governance of the 'Gypsy problem' in Italy mirrors the ongoing broader restructuring of welfare systems, with the devolution to the private and third sectors of many tasks previously in the public sector (see Chapters 4, 6, 7 and 8). This has expanded the definition of 'street level bureaucrats' to include also some non-state actors, who are also called to contribute to the formulation of public policy (Bottaccio 1999, Marcon 2004) and to maintain the status quo and reproduce the dominant discourse on 'Gypsies/nomads'. Sometimes, this happens through a process of co-optation of potential critical voices, a process that was resisted by one of the organisations interviewed in Florence,

We took the decision to reject the idea that a nomad camp had to be managed by external actors, because this reinforces the image of nomad camps as places where Roma are kept in captivity. We stuck to our decision also when we were confronted with arguments like 'If you don't do it, someone else with less experience will get the contract. Then it is better if you do it, because you know how to empower residents' (volunteer-based organisation, Florence, 2006)

Civil servants, social workers and third sector subcontractors play a crucial role in translating public policy on Roma into action. But, I have argued, they also contribute significantly to the development of new policy. This occurs in different ways. In this chapter, I have shown how certain field practices and methodologies of

pioneer front-line workers have consolidated over time, in the context of what I defined as a relatively unmapped bureaucratic territory. The dilemmas, knowledge, visions, and motivation of these individuals are therefore an important subject for investigation. In my analysis, I have shown how the work with the Roma, through experiments and errors, taught the state some useful lessons; lessons that, gradually formalised, have provided a blueprint for managing the settlement of other migrant and refugee groups.

This chapter contributes to recent ethnographic research on bureaucracy, which stresses how the operationalisation of state orders is not a straightforward process, despite perhaps appearing so to external subjects. Heyman (1995: 264), for example, has noticed in his work on US immigration officers how 'bureaucratic work is internally conflictive but appears, in the single-stranded relationship to the exterior, to be definitive [...] and rational'.

My work also documents the agency of front-line state and local government employees and how they can have a significant role in the implementation of public policies (cf. Gupta 1995; Ferguson 2002; Mountz 2003) and in some circumstances can contribute, with their 'suggestions' (social worker, F, Venice) and field knowledge, to the development of new policy.

However, the chapter has also emphasised the pervasive nature of the culturalist frame which defines the boundaries of the *conversation* on Roma, as well as the spaces within which social actors, including Roma and Ashkali, can articulate their agency. The accounts of local government employees and NGO workers show how these social actors articulate their views on the management of 'Gypsies', both in line with and in tension with official policy, as well as the extent to which they contribute not only to the implementation of policy, but to its development, by capitalising on their 'expert' knowledge of and proximity to the target population.

Furthermore, through the examination of the agency of 'front line bureaucrats', this chapter has disclosed a number of fault lines within the bureaucratic apparatus, such as that between official political discourse and actual policy and practice; or that opened by the conflict between bureaucratic roles and individuals in the role.

The analysis has also shown how the room for manoeuvre of front line bureaucrats, in particular of those who acted as pioneers in the new 'field of intervention', has changed over time as a result of the consolidation of some practices of intervention and of the increased emphasis on security and control, which culminated recently with the Ministry of the Interior advocating to the central government (through the local prefectures) the overall coordination of policy for 'nomads' (Sigona 2008a, 2009a).

This chapter has also analysed the extent to which, and in what ways, Romani interviewees engage with and adapt to the dominant discourse on 'Gypsies/nomads', and the different strategies of adaptation and resistance they adopt, stressing however the different perspectives of ordinary Roma and Ashkali and of Romani activists (cf. Prieto-Flores 2009).

CHAPTER TEN. CAMPS AND 'CAMPZENS': THE SPATIAL, THE SOCIAL, AND THE POLITICAL

At least, he thought, at least I have not been clever, and come back to Sea Point full of stories of how they beat me in the camps till I was thin as a rake and simple in the head. I was mute and stupid in the beginning, I will be mute and stupid at the end. There is nothing to be ashamed of in being simple. They were locking up simpletons before they locked up anyone else. Now they have camps for children whose parents run away, camps for people who kick and foam at the mouth, camps for people with big heads and people with little heads, camps for people with no visible means of support, camps for people chased off the land, camps for people they find living in storm-water drains, camps for street girls, camps for people who can't add two and two, camps for people who forget their papers at home, camps for people who live in the mountains and blow up bridges in the night. Perhaps the truth is that it is enough to be out of the camps, out of all the camps at the same time. Perhaps that is enough of an achievement, for the time being. How many people are there left who are neither locked up nor standing guard at the gate? I have escaped the camps; perhaps, if I lie low, I will escape the charity too (Coetzee, *Life & Time of Michael K.*).¹⁰⁷

Introduction

In chapter 5, I investigated the camp along two dimensions: one genealogical and the other geographical. The analysis of the discourse on nomad camps in the 1960s and 1970s provided a background to the regional laws on Roma/Gypsies/nomads, and revealed the assimilationist ethos behind camp policy, but also their being in part a response to the specific need of itinerant groups to have serviced areas where they can stop without threat of eviction by local police. The chapter also showed the transformation occurring within the Romani population between the

¹⁰⁷ Coetzee's novel had sat on my bedside table in Oxford for quite a while, I had approached it a couple of times only to leave it after a few pages. I eventually decided to take *Life & Time of Michael K.* with me on fieldtrip to Italy in February 2006. The novel became a brief but fascinating escape from the fieldwork, away from its excitement, intensity, and anxieties. However, it turned out to be just a sort-of-escape as soon Michael K.'s story began to resonate with my own experience in the nomad camps of Italy.

1990s and 2000s, contrasting it with the persistence of the nomad camp paradigm. Finally, it discussed the emersion of and the ambiguities surrounding the discourse on 'closing down nomad camps' in the 2000s. Successively, in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, I have examined in detail the emergence of nomad camps in Venice and Florence, their existence and consolidation and the partially successful attempts to close them down begun in the early 2000s.

In this chapter, after outlining the key conceptual references of my analysis, I will develop some of the themes that emerged in the earlier discussion, through the analysis on interviews' narratives collected in Tuscany and Veneto.

Taking as a starting point Massey's argument that 'the social and the spatial are inseparable' (Massey 1994: 254), in chapter 2, I discussed the spatial dimension of power and social interactions, arguing for a situated and circumstantial approach to the production and/or constitution of the subject, which not only acknowledges that social relations are necessarily spatial since individuals do not live within a void¹⁰⁸; but also recognises that power operates spatially, through the management of spaces (Foucault 1984; see also Gür 2002).

These conceptual standpoints inform my analysis in this chapter, and contribute to adding a further dimension to the previous discussion about the encounter between street bureaucrats – civil servants, social workers and other quasi-state actors – and the Romani communities, this being the place of the encounter, which is predominantly, but not exclusively¹⁰⁹, the nomad camp. Paying attention to *where* these encounters are performed can provide a more nuanced understanding of how Roma and Ashkali experience and inhabit the state, and how state policy and institutional labels construct them as situated subjects. Hence, this chapter places at the centre of the analysis the link between the 'nomad' and nomad camps, and investigates how, and to what extent, the experience of the nomad camp is

¹⁰⁸ See Malkki's critique of the tendency to use categories such as 'the refugee' and 'the refugee camp' as ideal-typical figures which float in a world 'without the gravities of history and politics' (1995: 518; cf Lammers 2005)

¹⁰⁹ Places like schools, hospital emergency wards, and streets (in particular, with reference to street beggars) are other important places where the state – personified by teachers, doctors and police – encounters Roma.

incorporated by and embodied in the residents, reflected in their subjectivity and, borrowing Harvey's expression (2000), how it shapes their 'spaces of hope'.

Furthermore, these concepts will inform my understanding of the nomad camp, which, rather than being the *natural* and *granted* product of a culture (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1997a), is constituted by a combination of social relations and roles 'within a series of wider, national and international, spatial division of labour' (Massey 1994: 14)¹¹⁰. A critical analysis of the nomad camp, therefore, has to reach far beyond its geographical borders and the people inhabiting it (see Bondi 2005).

From this perspective, and bearing in mind what was said earlier regarding nomad camps in Venice and Florence being *de facto* refugee camps, I would argue that nomad camps resemble other types of camps and institutions discussed in the recent sociological and political literature (Agamben 1995, 2003; Agier 2002; Bauman 1989, 2004; Malkki 1995; Boano and Floris 2005; Crisp and Jacobsen 1998; Diken and Bagge Lausten 2002, 2005; Hyndman 2003; Kotek and Rigoulot 2001; Kibreab 1993, 1999; Rahola 2003; Sanfilippo 2006).

In recent years, Giorgio Agamben's work (1995, 2003) on the camp (from the Nazi concentration camps to Guantanamo Bay via asylum reception centres) as a 'space of exception' has attracted a great deal of attention (see Diken and Carsten Bagge 2005; Boano and Floris 2005; Bauman 2002, 2004, Agier 2002; Rahola 2003; Marchetti 2006; Nyers 2006). The camp is seen as space of immobilization and deprivation of rights, under which certain categories of people live: a 'capture of life in law' (Agamben 1995 [1998]:26). In the state of exception, questions of citizenship and individual rights can be diminished, superseded, and rejected in the process of claiming an extension of power by the sovereign.

Agamben's conceptualisation resonates with Malkki's (2002) definition of refugee camps as places that discipline 'space and the movement of people, all the while producing knowledge for specific administrative, therapeutic, and other ends'

¹¹⁰ In my case, the local level should also be added to the list.

(2002: 353). Her work, however, adds also a further aspect: the ambivalent nature of refugee camps, which are places for both care and, at the same time, control.

For Andrijasevic (2009), Agamben's contribution to the study of detention camps and similar institutions, while insightful, has placed an overwhelming emphasis on the exceptionality of such institutions in relation to the 'rule of the law', and on the detention of migrants as a manifestation of state sovereignty attempting to stem unwanted migration flows. In contrast, Andrijasevic argues for a different conceptualisation of camps that focuses on the function they perform with regard to the transformation of the European space, and the constitution, hierarchisation, and segmentation of its citizenship, as well as the organization of its labour markets (cf. Papadopoulos et al. 2008; De Genova 2002, 2008; Balibar 1993; Rigo 2007). By re-centring the analysis of camps away from the State, this conceptualisation contributes to the development of a more agent-oriented approach to the understanding of international migration and the impact of immigration controls (cf. Castles and Miller 2009; Cohen 1997). This seems to echo Bauman's call to move away from an idea of refugees merely as 'sediments of other people's actions', towards the recognition of their agency (Bauman 2002: 343; cf. Malkki 1997a, 1997b).

The link mentioned earlier between camps and similar institutions and citizenship is central to the argument I will develop in the final section of this chapter, in which I introduce the concept of 'campzanship'. My analysis will be informed, in particular, by Balibar's work (2004) on the emergence, alongside the formal aspects of European citizenship, of what he calls a 'European apartheid' characterised by the proliferation of 'internal borders' that produces a segmentation and fragmentation of the concept of citizenship¹¹¹. This phenomenon, he notices (*idem*) affects in particular migrants and minorities (cf. Mezzadra and Rahola 2006; Walters 2002).

¹¹¹ With the phrase 'European apartheid', Balibar wants to 'to signal the critical nature of the contradiction between the opposite movements of inclusion and exclusion, reduplication of external borders in the form of 'internal borders', somatisation and repression of populations whose presence within European societies is nonetheless increasingly massive and legitimate' (2004: x)

This chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, I discuss the link between dominant discourse and nomad camps. Through the accounts of the Roma's 'discovery' of the camp, I will question the assumption that nomad camps are a product of Romani culture. In the second section, I explore the everyday life in/of the camp, and the process of adaptation and adjustment of residents to the camp environment, as well as how it is incorporated in the body of its inhabitants¹¹² (cf. Bourdieu 1991). The third section focuses upon the resources, entitlements, and 'rights' of camp residents and their interactions with the state apparatus, and explores what I term the 'comfort of exceptionality'. Finally, I will conclude by introducing the concept of 'campzanship', intended to capture the specific form of citizenship produced by the camp, and the impact and legacy of the camp on former residents.

Camps and visions

In the dominant discourse and in common belief in Italy (see Arrigoni and Vitale 2008), Roma are those who live in nomad camps. This credo exercises a strong influence on public policy for this population, despite the fact that less than half of the Romani population in Italy actually lives in nomad camps (Piasere 1999; Ministero dell'Interno 2008, Monasta 2004a). Together with broad generalisations on an alleged 'genetic' propensity of these communities to crime and child exploitation, the belief that Roma live in nomad camps is conducive to an image of the Romani minority as a (self)marginalised and anti-social group. This is reflected in the policy process, where it is often possible to detect a confusion over ethnic and social categories.

There are only partial figures on the geography and demography of nomad camps. The reliability of such figures is further complicated by the nature of the sources, which are often *ad hoc* small scale surveys which are both purpose-made and politically charged. It is estimated that one third of the Roma and Sinti population –

¹¹² For Bourdieu, 'the body is in the social world but the social world is also in the body' (1992: 190).

including both Italian and foreign citizens – lives in authorised or unauthorised camps. These are located mainly in isolated areas, poorly connected to towns and with precarious and inadequate services (Brunello 1996; ERRC 2000; Sigona and Monasta 2006). According to a national survey carried out in 2001, there are at least 18 thousand foreign Roma living in camps (Monasta 2004a). Since EU enlargement, the number of unauthorised settlements has increased, mainly as a consequence of the arrival of Romanian, and to a lesser extent Bulgarian, Roma.

The latest available data comes from a survey commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior, and conducted in Campania, Lazio and Lombardy by the police in cooperation with Italian Red Cross and Unicef. The ‘census’, as the Minister of the Interior insisted on calling it despite international criticism and accusations of ethnic discrimination and institutional racism (Maroni 2008), counted 167 settlements (124 of which were ‘illegal’) and 12,346 residents (5,436 of whom under the age of 18)¹¹³. Because the biometric data collected involved only ‘nomads’, there was indignation that the ‘census’ was a form of ethnic discrimination; yet the Minister of the Interior argued that the census was targeted exclusively to the inhabitants of nomad camps whatever their ethnic belonging and therefore not discriminatory¹¹⁴.

In the two quotes below we are offered an entry point into the analysis of the role of nomad camps in the dominant imagination surrounding this population, as one aspect of the dominant discourse on Roma – the alleged lack of personal hygiene – is addressed:

To say ‘the Gypsies are dirty’ is like a dog chasing its tail. If the local authority

¹¹³ In May 2008, the Italian government ordered the police to map legal and illegal nomad camps in three regions (Lombardy, Lazio and Campania) (Ordinanza del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri, no. 3678/2008) and to carry out the ‘identification and the census of people present in camps, including minors, through fingerprinting and biometric data collection’, and, whenever a violation of legal and administrative laws was identified, the ‘adoption of all the necessary measures needed for enforcing removal and expulsion’ of the individuals concerned’. The mapping of ‘nomad camps’ and the collection of biometric data of their residents started in June 2008. Roberto Maroni, the Minister of the Interior, assured that ‘it will certainly not be an ethnic data collection but rather a real and proper census to guarantee that those who have a right to stay can live in decent conditions and to send those who do not back home’(Ministero dell’Interno 2008a:1). The Italian government initiative raised numerous objections from human rights monitoring agencies and activists.

¹¹⁴ Elsewhere, I have discussed this particular ‘census’ in detail, as well as the politics of the current Italian government on Roma (Sigona 2009a; see also Simoni 2008a; 2008b).

supplies a camp with one toilet and a single shower for every fifty residents, then it should be no surprise if the toilet clogs up or the shower breaks and the Roma end up dirty. It's a huge vicious cycle (senior social worker, f, Venice)

Just try to imagine a kid from the camp who one morning goes to school and 31 ticks jump out of his backpack, and you can get an idea of how hard it can be for this kid to go to school (social worker, f, Florence).

Both interviewees point to the living conditions in camps to explain why it can sometimes be hard for people living in camps, including taking care of their personal hygiene according to the 'standards' of people living in houses (and with running water).

Furthermore, both interviewees also single out two institutional actors that play crucial roles in the lives of Roma: in the first account, the senior social worker notices that local authorities, their planning offices, and their decisions, contribute to producing the conditions that end up confirming the stereotypes on Roma; and in the second quote, the interviewee provides an example of how the rhetoric on integration and the assumptions about a Roma predisposition to self-marginalisation and lack of interest in schooling should be rethought with consideration of their living conditions and experience in Italy.

Overall, both interviewees, social workers who are in contact with Roma on a daily basis, clearly locate the issue of the living conditions of Roma outside the domain of the culturalist discourse, which instead privileges endogenous factors as explanation for Romani socio-economic marginalisation and lack of hygiene, and by this means situate the camp in the geography of the city (i.e. linking the camp to the school), and connect its inhabitants to local polity (i.e. it is local authorities that take decisions on camps and their inhabitants, not an abstract delocalised sovereign).

However, on a different level of analysis, it should also be noticed that in countering the dominant discourse on Roma's lack of personal hygiene, both interviewees do not deny the assumption that the Roma are dirty; rather they offer a different explanation for it. However, this should not be taken to mean that they think all Roma are dirty: rather, they seem to suggest that all camp inhabitants for objective reasons outside of their control are dirty, which significantly shifts the discourse

away from biological racism. However, in so doing, they implicitly conflate the Roma minority only to those Roma who live in nomad camps, confirming the dominant credo mentioned at the beginning of this section. Therefore, it is noteworthy that even if speaking from a broadly sympathetic perspective, interviewees' positionality – their role and everyday experience with Romani clients – surface in their 'gaze' on Roma as essentially those living in camps, since camps are the main *loci* of public assistance and control.

By contrast to such strongly held and pervasive beliefs, the narratives of the arrival of Roma refugees in Italian nomad camps tell a different story: a story of discovery and bewilderment with the situation they encountered, and a situation very different from the life they had in Kosovo.

My dad came to meet us at the train station. We took a taxi that left us outside the camp. I couldn't believe what I saw. 'Dad, where is our house?' I asked. 'This is it', he replied. Our house was an old caravan. I stepped in. I still remember that moment. There was one plate, one spoon, one pan and a fridge with a single tomato and a can of tripe (Rom, f, Florence).

I didn't know places like this could exist. I didn't know my husband lived like this in Italy. I used to ask him: 'why don't you take me with you? I thought he was having a good time, that Italy was a dream... a paradise (Rom, f, Florence).

I just wanted to go back to my country. I had never seen a camp before, even if my dad had described it, I couldn't imagine it (Ashkali, m, Florence).

These three interviewees reunited with members of their family already in Florence in 1999, when the war forced them to leave Kosovo. For all of them the nomad camp is an unexpected, even unimaginable, discovery. For some interviewees the contrast between the reality of the camp, the previous life in Kosovo, and the failed expectations about Italy is overwhelming.

I arrived in Florence in 1993 and I stayed in a camp [Masini] for 23 days. To me, it seemed like 230 days. I felt really bad. I cried every night. Sometimes I would escape and go to sleep in a hotel (Rom, m, council flat in Florence).

The initial days, weeks, even months are a painful memory to recall. However, after some time, people begin to cope with the new reality, and find the strength and

resources to adjust to the camp, as illustrated in the following account, and discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Outside the caravan there was a bed without mattress. I used to lie on the bed for hours. I was on that bed, still like a stone, for a week. I couldn't sleep at night. I spent my day spotting rats. But after a week I woke up. I began to cook, to do the washing up and to watch my grandson running around (Rom, f, Florence).

Camps and their inhabitants

To live segregated in a camp makes positive integration impossible (Rom, m, Florence).

Living in a camp – sometimes briefly, more often for years – affects the lives of residents in many ways. Livelihood strategies, attitudes towards non-Roma and understandings of 'integration', identity building – as a situated process of making sense of the world (see chapter 2) – and even health, are all, to different degrees, produced by the camp. In the following account, a Romani activist in Florence highlights some of these multiple impacts,

The camp neither improves the situation nor changes it. It doesn't help the Roma participation in the social fabric. It rather holds back this process. The camp surrounds and excludes its inhabitants to the point that later people can say: 'these are the Roma and they will be always the same, they will never change' (Rom, m, Florence).

In this account from a veteran Romani activist¹¹⁵, the focus of attention is mainly on the relationship with the outside world: the city, majority society and the local government. For the interviewee, the camp and those who sponsor this solution (i.e. the local authority) are responsible for the perpetuation of the status quo, which condemns residents to a frozen present, with no alternatives or ways out. But

¹¹⁵ I have known the interviewee for ten years. We met several times at formal meetings and informal gatherings. During my main fieldwork in 2005-2006, he took me around to visit former camp residents dispersed in Tuscany and we had long chats and debriefings in the car before and after these visits. He is a key spokesperson for the Roma in Florence and at the national level. He collaborates with mainstream NGOs and is used to speaking with researchers. Once half-joking he told me: 'no, Nando, not another interview! Let's go for a walk and chat instead'. The extract above is from a formal interview carried out in 2002.

it is not only the Roma who are affected; the whole social fabric pays the consequences of this policy. In fact, enclosing the Roma in spaces such as camps not only impacts on their attitude towards the majority society but also provides an argument to those who believe that the Roma are content living in camps, and that they do not aspire to change their circumstances. However, besides activists' statements, which are nonetheless important for understanding how Romani activists position themselves in the public debate on the Roma issue, there is also another side of the story: the everyday experiences of camp residents, and the different ways in which they adapt and adjust to the camp and its rules. Focusing on everyday interactions and experiences reveals a more complicated story, shedding light on internal dynamics and conflicts, and, importantly, enabling us to more fully appreciate camp residents' everyday lives, agency, and coping strategies.

Accounts of everyday life

Two Romani women offer vivid accounts of life in the camp, showing the hardship (and resilience) of running a family confined in the few square metres of a caravan.

This isn't life, it's something really horrible. When the winter comes and there is cold and rain, you can't open the door [of the caravan]; you can't even cook, or knead the bread, because everything is outside (Rom, f, Florence).

I spend my days in the camp with my daughter-in-law. I have three grandchildren. They like to stay with me. I don't care if they damage the caravan. Nothing can be more important to me than them (Rom, f, Florence).

The enforced proximity produced by the camp, as two interviewees explain, exacerbates internal tensions, fosters intra-community pressure and control, and deprives individuals of privacy.

We lived in the camp for eight months. There were always troubles; you couldn't have silence, not even in your caravan (Rom, m, dispersed outside Florence).

There is nothing to like in this camp. It feels like someone is staring at you all the time, even when you go to the toilet. I hate hearing them speak behind my back because I go out with an Italy boy. They accuse me of giving a bad example. They just don't understand that I want to be different from them (Rom, f, Florence).

Urban isolation; rigid management of internal spaces; invasive controls through CCTV cameras, private security, and 24h guardianship; and 'soft' control through social workers and subcontractors also impact on the internal dynamics of camps, as shown by the different trajectories of the Poderaccio and Oimatello camps (illustrated in detail in chapter 7). The style of management adopted by the agencies in charge of the day-to-day running of camps can play an important role in the life of camps and impact on the relationship between residents, and between inmates and the majority society. In the following extract, a social worker gives a concrete example.

I think that the decision by the local authority to subcontract the running of the camp to a cooperative specialised in dealing with drug addiction caused a lot of problems. They treated Romani families as drug addicts, without any autonomy or recognition of their individualities and their culture. For this kind of cooperative it is easier to substitute the parental role and do activities for 300 children than to promote Roma's autonomy. Their greatest fear was that the Roma would become independent and they would be left with nothing to do (social worker, f, Venice)

In Florence, at the time of fieldwork (2005-2006), the public prosecutor had launched a criminal investigation into the cooperative in charge of the 'global service' at Oimatello for extortion against some of its employees and tax evasion over a period of six years. One of the tasks of the 'global service' was to facilitate access to the job market for Roma. To this end, the cooperative had employed a number of Roma residents for camp guardianship and cleaning, and recommended others for jobs in factories and offices. However, according to an interviewee,

The manager used to take bribes from the salaries of the Roma working for the cooperative. But they kept quiet. They were afraid of being sacked. Many worked also without being paid, because for them it was important to have a formal contract to bring to the police when it was time to renew the residence permit. Now all of them are unemployed (Rom, m, Florence).

This statement and the ones below show the imbalance of power that characterises the relationship between the publicly-funded cooperative and the Roma employees. They also expose the multiple vulnerabilities of camp residents, and the interplay between legal, social, and economic factors.

The former employees defend the cooperative even now because they guaranteed a more stable income to their household (activist, m, Florence).

[In the camp] there are those who are protected by the cooperative. Those who live out of petty crimes and can be easily blackmailed; those who were in jail and had their children taken away by social services and must behave if they want to see them again (Rom, m, Florence).

Adapting to and embodying the camp

It may be a week or a month, or sometimes longer; nonetheless sooner or later newcomers gradually adjust to the new environment – to the camp and its rules, and to the new country.

At the beginning, I really wanted to go back to Kosovo. But, when in 2001 I went to visit my grandparents in Serbia for a week, I realised that I was missing Florence. Now I couldn't leave Florence, it would be as painful as it was to leave Pristina, perhaps even more (Rom, f, council flat in Florence).

The initial vivid impressions fade away day by day and new routines begin to shape out of the resources and opportunities available. An inhabitant of the new villages in Florence outlines his trajectory from the discovery of the camp in the early 1990s and the experience of begging, to the new village and a *socially acceptable* job, conveyed through references to some of his institutional clients.

It was hard to change our flat in Kosovo for a caravan. I have been in Florence for fifteen years. I was only 14 when I fled. We all expected Italy to be like at home. When I first saw the camp I felt disheartened. But, after a while we got used to it. At the beginning we begged and sold roses from town to town. I wasn't good at it. I felt so ashamed. But then I found a job, initially I was paid ITL 150,000 (75 euro) a month for four hours a day. Then, the salary became ITL 400,000 (200 euro). Now I work as upholsterer. We work also for the local authority, the prefecture and the police (Rom, m, Florence).

In the accounts, the camp and the city are often juxtaposed. The stunning beauty of Venice and Florence seems irreconcilable with the reality of camps, but, nonetheless, they coexist in the experiences of interviewees, pointing towards the need to look at the experience of the camp not in isolation, but rather as part of

broader migration projects and histories, as well as of broader geographies (see Tabucchi 1999).

Florence is really beautiful, even if the place where I live is worse than the one I left in Kosovo. Here in Italy I feel freer, I feel like I opened my eyes. In Kosovo I was like a slave, I had to ask for my parents-in-law's permission for everything (Rom, f, Florence).

However, it is important to point out that in Italian camps, there are not only first generation migrants. Generations of children were born in Italian camps and spend most of their childhood in such confined spaces. The camp becomes part of their *identities and bodies* (Bourdieu 1977: 87; cf. Wacquant 2008). This gives rise to two considerations. First, taking into account the impact of camps on new generations complicates the discussion of the 'cultural' origin of nomad camps, as it raises the issue of the long term impact of policies that produced the segregation of Romani communities in camps: communities that in turn live and reproduce in those camps.

My first child was born in the Masini camp where I spent two years with my wife as soon as we arrived. The second one was born in the new village (Rom, m, Florence).

Sometimes I have to use Italian to speak to my son. 'Daddy, I don't know this word', he says and I repeat it in Italian. He will learn our language when he gets older (Rom, m, Florence).

Second, the experience of the camps leaves permanent scars on its inhabitants giving a concrete and practical meaning to Bourdieu's notion of 'historical embodiment' where the body is 'the sites of incorporated history' (Bourdieu 1991: 17). Camps produce material consequences on the lives of camp residents as demonstrated by recent medical and epidemiological research on the impact of camps on the health of residents, particularly children (Monasta 2004b; Danova Russinova 2004)¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁶ Monasta conducted a community epidemiological study of the health of Kosovan and Macedonian Romani children in five 'nomad camps' (Florence, Bergamo, Venice, Bolzano, Brescia) which shows the impact of environmental factors on the health condition of children aged between 0-5 years. The study, in particular, finds a very high incidence of respiratory difficulties, especially active asthma, and diarrhoea (Monasta 2004a) among children living in camps.

Campzenship: nomad camps and citizenship

Protection, recognition, and anonymity

We witnessed the arrival of more and more people for whom - Roma or non Roma likewise - the existing nomad camps of Florence became a safe haven and a point of reference (social worker, f, Florence).

When I arrived in Florence, I met some Roma and followed them. I lived at Poderaccio for nearly three years (Rom, m, dispersed outside Florence)

In previous chapters, I have shown how, in the absence of an adequate asylum reception system, in the 1990s nomad camps offered a safe haven for displaced people from the Balkans, not exclusively ethnic Roma.

Nomad camps became 'catalysts for newcomers' (activist, f, Venice). However, the deficiencies of the asylum system, while being important factors in determining the arrival of many Roma and Ashkali in camps, do not explain alone why they stayed there. The camp, I would argue, offered the 'comfort of exceptionality', providing people with limited resources and no rights access to some kind of protection and recognition, as well as some practical advantages.

Three main characteristics - protection, recognition and anonymity – seem to define the ambiguous nature of camp. The apparent paradox of a place that simultaneously makes individuals invisible and yet projects the Roma as a collective into the political arena, is captured in the following quote.

Roma have understood that concentration can offer some benefits: on the one hand, an individual, even without papers, can disappear in the mass and live undisturbed. On the other, concentration makes the Roma visible as a political issue and is a reminder that there are people waiting for the recognition of their rights (activist, m, Florence).

However, a consequence of anonymity is also the loss of individuality. The camp turns all residents into an undifferentiated and homogeneous 'Gypsy' collective. For Kotek and Rigoulot (2001:5), 'the camp concerns the masses and produces masses'. In other words, the dominant discourse on Roma as an enclosed nomadic people refusing any form of integration in settled society (Brunello 1996; Colacicchi 1995;

Sigona 2005a, 2008) produced the camp, and the camp and its system of governance, in turn, reifies the discourse, fulfilling its prophecy by guarding the distance between inmates and the outside world (Sibley 1981).

There are many Roma in the camp working in the drug business, I'm not denying it. But, if they were in Germany or UK, what would happen to them? The law would make a distinction between honest people and criminals (Rom, m, Florence).

Stating that 'Italy is neither Germany nor UK' – that is countries where criminals are persecuted and honest people are not blamed for crimes they have not committed – the interviewee reminds us that nomad camps do not operate in isolation. Racism and injustice are currency in the everyday experience of Roma in Italy. However, camps not only operate in a broader context, but are also the products of this specific political, social, and cultural milieu. In other words, they are neither 'extraterritorial' nor an 'exception'.

To understand the 'normality' of camps, the everyday working of these spaces, and their systemic role, it may be useful to pay attention to how Kosovo Roma and Ashkali came to find protection and recognition through them.

During the 1990s, under pressure from activists and advocacy groups, local authorities gradually began to acknowledge the presence of Roma refugees and migrants, and to register the inhabitants of official nomad camps as local residents. This was an essential step towards securing longer term leave to remain in Italy as well as accessing to welfare provisions, which are mainly tied to 'residency' in a specific local authority (Brunello 1996; Solimano 1999; Ambrosini and Tosi 2007).

By attaching some entitlements and a 'promise' of legal status to nomad camps, the local authorities made official camps appealing to newcomers. However, limited places and high demands also created competition amongst Roma, which sometimes led to open conflict, in particular at times of larger arrivals, as in 1999. For those who succeeded in getting a place, staying in the camp made it easier to renew residence permits, also because local authorities often intervened as guarantor for camp residents or as a mediator between camp residents and authorities in charge of assessing applications for leaves to remain. A civil servant gives an example:

We had to negotiate an informal agreement with the immigration police and eventually they issued a special certificate, with special stamps, altogether a real exception that gave the family the possibility to stay in Italy for family reasons (civil servant, f, Florence).

It is worth noting that this happened also because, rather than to apply for asylum, people were advised by NGOs and local authorities to convert their temporary resident permits on humanitarian grounds (renewed automatically every six months until the end of hostilities), into longer term work permits (for which individual had to apply every 2-4 years at 1999).

In the 1990s, it was much easier for them. Having the residence permit renewed only every two or four years, they could more easily cope with periods in which they were unemployed, and find a formal job when it was time to renew the papers (social worker, f, Venice).

However, in 2002, following the electoral victory of a centre-right coalition, the new government, led by Silvio Berlusconi, adopted a tougher approach to immigration and drastically amended the rules on stay permits (*permesso di soggiorno*) for economic migrants (Bossi-Fini Law, no. 189/2002). The duration of stay permits became shorter and in order to get them renewed, applicants had to prove that they had been in continuous employment for at least a year¹¹⁷. For many families, the new legislation meant falling back into a situation of extreme precariousness and insecurity. The camp once again became a safe haven, a place where the consequences of the tougher national approach to migration were somehow mitigated.

I'm terrorised by the fear of being evicted from the camp. I fear that will they say: 'You are no more entitled to live here'. My permit has expired. What is it going to become of me if I'm evicted? I'll become a homeless person? (elderly Romani woman, Florence)

¹¹⁷ In case of unemployment for more than 6 months, the residence permit was not renewed.

At the local level, the Roma's 'bare' presence and the visibility given by camps gained Roma some entitlements: 'local rights', adopting Zincone's localism of rights discussed earlier (Zincone 1994; cf. Stacul 2006). The *soft* nature of these 'local rights' is revealed in the following example.

I applied for a council flat at the last call, but they excluded me because my permit to stay is for less than two years – this is because of the Bossi-Fini Law on immigration. Anyway, I want to say thank you to Florence local authority that built the new villages for us (Rom, m, Florence).

The room of manoeuvring for local authorities vis-à-vis the national government is limited and fluid. The local authorities of Florence, in this case, duly applied the Bossi-Fini Law, and consequently rejected the application for a council flat. Nonetheless, it offered the interviewee, regularly resident in Florence, but with a short term leave to remain, a place in the new villages which had been built to accommodate those who for various reasons did not have access to council flats (see chapter 7). The words of two civil servants validate this point, revealing the ambiguity that characterises the relationship between national legislation and local policy and practice:

Of course, by law, the local authority cannot offer shelter to those without papers. In reality, over the years we have given shelter to thousands of 'illegals', because our approach as a local authority has always been characterized by a welcoming reception policy and practice (civil servant, f, Florence).

These are political decisions. We approach the issue in this way: if today, according to the criteria that we as a local authority choose, I certified that you are entitled to some kind of assistance, I am not going to let someone else with refugee status turn up and take your place or entitlements. From our point of view, refugees are first of all the responsibility of the state. We are not here to solve problems created by the state, that decided to abandon its own asylum reception policy (civil servant, f, Venice).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the lack of places to accommodate newcomers, and the natural demographic growth of camp populations increased the need for accommodation. This need, together with the relative 'generosity' of (some) local authorities who were able to provide assistance if not accommodation, became a

driving force for the appearance of unauthorised settlements in the vicinity of official areas. These settlements often hosted relatives and acquaintances of 'official' residents, and other people waiting for vacant places in the official camps to come up (Brunello 1996; Mori 1998; Marcetti, Mori and Solimano 1993). Proximity to official camps also becomes a way of accessing some kind of residual support and services from the voluntary sector and local authorities. In the 1990s and early 2000s informal encampments were often tolerated and they grew during this period and gradually consolidated, sometimes even receiving the official 'stamp' after a few years.

There were two main camps and a few other transient satellites. One was authorised. The second one was almost as big as the first, just fifty metres away from each other. It became authorised only in 2002, when the city council amended the criteria for recognition, including the length of settlement, also for people temporarily without papers (senior social worker, f, Florence).

The camp is a protected environment, a safer haven for individuals living in a permanent condition of insecure legal status¹¹⁸ and economic marginality. Intra-community support, an informal economy, and local welfare provide the basis for survival. In the camp, the boundaries between entitlements and concessions, rights and charity are blurred. The inmates cope on a daily basis with a situation of extreme power asymmetry, under permanent threat of being swept away if or when local political circumstances change.

Getting closer to the camp and its inhabitants through the adoption of an ethnographic gaze reveals that 'exceptionality' is indeed the norm, and that rights, entitlements, obligations, and protocols are reshaped, bended, adjusted, neglected, and activated by everyday practice and interactions, as illustrated in the accounts below, in which two interviewees offer examples of ongoing tensions between different institutions dealing with Roma.

¹¹⁸ In the experience of foreign Roma in Italy, undocumentedness is not an end status, rather it is a condition and a possibility in which to fall, sooner or later, for some time (cf. Bloch et al. 2009; De Genova 2002; Coutin 2000; Kofman 2002; Schuster 2005; Morris 2001).

I never really understood why the police require official camp residents to provide not only the certificate of residence as for every other applicant, but also a letter from us in which we declare that they are authorised to live at the Oلماتello camp. To me, this seems a peculiar request! (social worker, f, Florence).

The local authority is responsible for denying the fundamental right to family reunion of Roma living at the Oلماتello camp because, even if you are officially authorised to live in the camp, if you apply for family reunion, the police will reject your application. You have no chance of reuniting with your family because the housing units bought by the local authority do not fulfil the legal requirements set by the national legislation (civilian police officer, f, Florence).

To conclude, in this section I have tried to bring together two different, but to a great extent complementary, lines of research regarding the camp and citizenship, in which the camp as a 'space of exception' (Agamben 2003) is not itself an exception, but rather a central instrument for managing the outcasts of modernity, the 'wasted lives' of the new international order in Bauman's words (Bauman 2004). The camp is one of the several layers of modern citizenship, marked by external as much by internal borders which determine rights and entitlements of individuals and groups. Even more to the point, following Massey's insight on the relation between the spatial, the social, and the political, I would argue that the camp produces a specific form of situated citizen, the 'campzen', whose rights and entitlements are determined by the specific social and political circumstances, power dynamics, and discourses which have produced and govern the camps, among which, in the case of 'nomad camp', the discourse on 'nomadism' and the negative image 'Gypsies' play a central role.

Exit strategies and the legacy of the camp

The camp follows its inhabitants also into the outside world, well beyond the architectural borders that define its geographical space. It is ingrained in residents' bodies (earlier I referred as an extreme example to the impact on residents' health), and public personae, for example limiting their employability, and forcing them into living conditions that then reinforce stereotypes about Roma lack of hygiene. Nonetheless, I have also shown that the camp provides inhabitants with some

degree of 'comfort' – through protection, recognition and anonymity - defining a fluid and soft set of rights, duties, and entitlements that I termed *campzenship*.

In this section, I focus on a particular moment, the exit from the camp as a result of the change of policy by local authorities, to explore if, how, and to what extent *campzenship* survives the closure of camps. However, first of all a clarification: as illustrated in chapters 6, 7 and 8, local authorities' strategies for closing camps combined different exit pathways and housing solutions. In Venice, the closure was pursued mainly via access to council flats and incentives to buy properties in remote areas where costs were affordable; in Florence, the main solutions were access to council flats, relocation of camp residents to 'new villages' built on previous sites, and mediation and assistance in renting properties in the region through an ad hoc regional dispersal programme. This variety of options, together with the different histories of the families involved in the projects, produced a variety of responses among former camp residents. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise if, while a senior social worker recalls 'the residents' incredible resistance to leaving camps' (social worker, f, Venice), a Romani woman who lived in the Olmatello camp for ten years waiting for a council flat declares her enthusiasm for the much awaited new home: 'At home, I feel like a queen' (Rom, f, Florence), or a Romani interviewee dispersed in a remote village in Veneto complains of the isolation of the new home: 'Even if I'm quite ok here, I'd rather move somewhere more central, to have someone to talk to' (Rom, m, dispersed outside Venice).

For a number of institutional (and quasi institutional) interviewees, Roma's resistance to joining dispersal schemes was explained in terms of a chronic (and often cultural) dependency syndrome. The following account of a Romani interviewee offers a more articulated explanation:

Today I've got a job, but tomorrow who knows. How can I support my family and pay for rent and utilities? And what about my permit to stay? I don't earn much, and for months I also had to work without a formal contract (Rom, m, dispersed outside Florence).

The concerns enlisted above show some of the material circumstances behind Roma's resistance to move out of camps. Moreover, they also place the camp in the

broader context, characterised by extreme flexibility in the labour market, through a weakening of workers' rights, and conditionality of permits to stay to long term job contracts¹¹⁹. These are material circumstances and vulnerabilities to which the dispersal programmes – ad hoc programmes designed for camp residents, and in a sense an expression of the 'exceptionality' of camps – cannot provide an answer. On the contrary, they sometimes leave families exposed and even more vulnerable, as happened in Venice to some of the families who were encouraged to commit to mortgages. The local councillor for social affairs in Venice explains, with what seems a convoluted argument, the rationale of the initiative:

To take out a mortgage is a great responsibility for the subscribers and also, I think, a great incentive to move out of the condition of dependency (local councillor for social affairs, m, Venice).

In Florence, a Romani cultural mediator in charge of liaising with dispersed families gives an account of the difficulties he encounters in his job.

I try to explain to them that they will no longer be in a nomad camp; that they will be resettled and we'll support them for two years, even three if they have health or economic problems. It is hard to explain and for them to accept that they will move from a situation where everything is free, to one where you are in charge of paying your utility bills and rent. So they complain. It is hard to adjust to this change. We organise meetings with these families to explain the situation to them. At the beginning they say they understand, but after six months, when they lose their jobs, we have to start from zero (Romani cultural mediator, m, Florence).

This narrative combines the dominant discourse of service providers and authorities (i.e. 'the Roma don't want to leave their condition of dependency and need to be persuaded to do so with two-three years of special assistance'), and the interviewee's insider understanding of the actual circumstances of families. At the

¹¹⁹ According to the Decree n. 334/2004 entitled 'Renewal of residence permit', the renewal of residence permits for work depends upon evidence of a regular contract of employment, whose length affects the duration of the permit to stay.

end, he admits that all his efforts to explain and persuade are in vain as soon as the family income evaporates due to unemployment.

Two aspects of the previous quotes are particularly relevant here: the link between housing policy and legal status, and the kind of assistance provided to former camp residents dispersed in Tuscany and Veneto. For the first, for people with insecure legal status and limited access to the job market, not only may the running costs of a house be unsustainable, but they can also jeopardise the family's chances of renewing their permits to stay. This is confirmed indirectly by the 'exceptional' measures taken by the local authorities in Venice, to guarantee the successful implementation of the Mila project. A senior social worker explains,

Our office has continued to assist former camp residents particularly in relation to the renewal of documents. When we couldn't come up with a solution, I must say, the police helped us to find acceptable solutions [for them] (senior social worker, f, Venice).

The second aspect concerns the relationship between former camp residents with social services and NGOs that have 'managed' them while in camps. In the discussion of the regional dispersal programmes (cf. part 3), I emphasised how the local authorities of Florence and Venice (and their service providers) assisted and supported, to various degrees, dispersed families even outside their areas of competence. While the scheme in Florence provides support to the families for up to three years from dispersal (the first two years are for all participants, no matter what their economic circumstances are), in Venice, the assistance by the Mila implementing agency and the social services in Venice was much shorter (Bragato and Menetto 2007). As for the 'new villages' in Florence, it is worth noticing that to some extent the 'comforts' of camps carry on even in the new villages, to the point of raising legitimate questions over the 'novelty' of the new villages. A social worker explains the decision of the local authority:

The local government decided that at least for the first year, subject to revision by the technical committees, since the inhabitants were coming from a situation in which they were not asked to pay for anything, that residents will continue not to pay utility bills, but [will pay] only a very small rent (social worker, f, Florence).

Conclusion

I refuse to be treated like this. This is a prison. Our people have the right to an honest life (Rom, m, Florence).

The interplay between the social, the spatial, and the political is at the core of this chapter, where I have focused my attention on nomad camps along two main directions: the camp in the governance of the 'Gypsy problem', and the everyday experiences and agency of camp inhabitants. By locating the 'Gypsy problem' in nomad camps, I wanted to emphasise the situated nature of social and power relations, from above as much as from below. In other words, my focus has been twofold: to analyse the link between dominant discourse and the camp, stressing particularly the production and reproduction of the dominant discourse through the camp; and to analyse the link between the camp and its inhabitants, focusing in particular on subjectivation as a situated process.

Interviewees' accounts and ethnographic observations have provided the backbone of my discussion, which shows the complex dynamics of resistance and adaptation in nomad camps and have revealed the ambiguous relationship that links the inhabitants of camps to those who manage the camps, as well as the camp inhabitants' capacity of adaptation to the limited resources available to them.

Juxtaposing the dominant discourse on Roma and camps to the narratives of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali refugees describing their first impressions of Italian nomad camps, the chapter questions the culturalist approach to nomad camps, but does not provide an alternative essentialist truth. Rather, it emphasises that living for many years in a confined space affects not only residents' coping strategies, but becomes ingrained in bodies and identities. In other words, the nomad camp produces the 'nomads'. The words of a Romani interviewee capture this process.

I think that if you live in a camp for twenty years you forget what living really is (Rom, m, council flat in Florence).

The current debate on camps, in particular Agamben's conceptualisation of camps as spaces of exception, Bauman's invitation (2004) to look at camps not as exceptions but rather as products of modernity and collectors of the excess of

humanity ('wasted lives' in his words), and Balibar's reconceptualisation of European citizenship (2004) vis-à-vis the proliferations of internal borders, have provided an engaging theoretical terrain on which to explore the nomad camp, and the specific rules, regulations, rights, and entitlements that govern the lives of its inhabitants, and its role in the broader polity. The concept of 'campzanship' which I put forward in this chapter aims to capture the specific and situated form of citizenship produced by the camp, and to explain how nomad camps came to be 'catalysts for newcomers' (activist, f, Venice). The camp, I have argued, offered to newcomers the 'comfort of exceptionality', providing individuals who had limited resources and no rights with access to (some kind of) protection and recognition, as well as some practical benefits.

In the 1990s, camps offered shelter, in the absence of other options, to thousands of Roma and Ashkali escaping from war, persecution, and poverty. Their existence was brought into the public domain by the Balkan Roma and induced local authorities to intervene, often under pressure from activists and volunteers. Local authorities provided, directly or indirectly, some kind of welfare provision to residents. The camps gave the Roma a degree of visibility – both causing mayhem among local inhabitants (cf. chapter 5) and soliciting the involvement of charities and the voluntary sector – that contributed to raising their public profile, and started at a local level a process of their recognition as social and political actors.

These more benign aspects of camps are often overlooked in scholarship, which tends to emphasise only the segregating and exclusionary nature of camps and to portray them exclusively as spaces of control over a group of people deemed to represent a threat to society. But, camps are also much more: they are spaces of everyday life, where social networks, affiliations, and informal exchanges provide an alternative support mechanism in a situation marked by widespread anti-Gypsyism, public hostility, precarious entitlements, and conditional rights. To acknowledge the 'double' nature of camps can positively contribute, I would argue, to the current debate on alternative housing solutions for camp residents, and provide some clues concerning the failure of projects supporting the resettlement of Roma outside nomad camps.

However, emphasising the benign side of camps does not diminish their negative side; rather, it may help us to reconsider the terms of the current debate, and refocus our attention on the role that camps play in the management of the 'Gypsy problem'. This change enables attention to shift away from the Roma and their alleged cultural underdevelopment – as was apparent in the debate around the opening up of campsites in the 1970s but also later – to the interplay of Roma with the social and geographical milieu where they live, and the need to find a solution which addresses the housing needs of these communities as much as the processes and relations which have produced and maintained the existence of camps.

CHAPTER ELEVEN. CONCLUSION

A man consists of a body, a soul, and a passport (Russian proverb)

The consul banged the table and said,

'If you've got no passport you're officially dead':

But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

(WH Auden, Refugee Blues)

Introduction

This final chapter provides a brief overview of the argument I put forward in the study, points out its main theoretical contributions to knowledge, and identifies some areas and directions for further research.

Based on an ethnographic study of a 'policy community', this thesis has examined the complex interplay between discourses, policies, and practices which contribute to the definition of the Romani population as a social and political 'problem' in Italy.

Drawing upon an in-depth analysis of the working and multiple dimensions of the so-called 'Gypsy problem', the thesis has shown how the existing discursive and policy framework on 'Gypsies/nomads' has governed the settlement of newly arrived Roma and Ashkali forced migrants from Kosovo in the 1990s, and shaped their experiences and coping strategies.

In the study, I have argued that this process of co-optation into the existing 'Gypsy/nomad' frame is the result of three main factors, namely the pervasiveness of stereotypes on the Romani population, the deficiencies of the Italian asylum reception system, and, related to the latter, the weakness of Italian discourse on 'asylum'.

Nonetheless, I have also argued that protocols and working practices developed for assisting displaced people from former Yugoslavia and from Kosovo in particular (many of whom were ethnic Roma) during the 1990s have acted as blueprints for the development of the National Asylum Programme in the early 2000s, questioning the dominant credo of the Roma, and the policy for Roma, as an exception, and exceptional, respectively.

The study has examined the development, over a period of four decades, of the discourse on 'Gypsies', emphasising the strong culturalist bias which permeates it, and the centrality on the idea of the Romani population as inherently nomadic. The latter, I have argued, is a convenient characterisation. By framing the Romani population as inherently nomadic – that is, their mobility being fundamentally different from 'normal' people's mobility – not only did it become possible for Italian authorities to legitimise the rejection of well-founded claims for humanitarian protection from Romani displaced people; but it also became justifiable to refuse the newcomers opportunities to settle down permanently, and to develop and implement public policy which has contributed to the spatial and social segregation of these communities. The so-called 'nomad camps', an important product of this culturalist logic, epitomise this chain of processes.

Nomad camps, I have argued, serve multiple purposes; the most relevant of which is to provide a locus where institutional and quasi-institutional social actors can concentrate their efforts aimed at disciplining, in a Foucauldian sense, the 'Gypsies'.

The analysis of Italian discourse and policy on this population has provided concrete evidence of how disciplining has been achieved since the 1960s. Policing, and social assistance and schooling have dominated public intervention on this population, confirming Gheorghe and Liégeois' remark (1995) that policies of control, exclusion, and assimilation are not 'mutually exclusive'; rather they coexist and overlap.

However, the case studies of Florence and Venice have also demonstrated that the configuration of the 'Gypsy problem' is space- and time- specific, the result of the interaction of several social actors – political parties, bureaucrats, volunteers, NGOs, community organisations, media and Roma and Sinti – and of different agendas.

Developed along two main axes: vertically, through the observation of the interplay between local, regional, and national authorities, and horizontally, through comparing and contrasting how two cities have governed the presence of Romani people in their territory, my examination of the process of problematisation of Romani people shows how the different configurations of the 'Gypsy problem' are determined both by motivations, visions, and practices of social actors, and factors

such as the existing institutional arrangements and political opportunity structure. In the case of Italy, this means, in particular, administrative decentralisation, strong local political cultures, and devolution to the private and third sectors of many tasks previously in the public realm.

Bureaucratic labelling, I have argued in the thesis, is an important component of local framings of the Romani population. Examining the thick web of political, administrative, and specialised institutions involved in the governance of the Romani population locally, the thesis has shown how labels can make an individual, group, or issue visible, and on what terms, to the 'gaze' of the state, determining, in other words, which institution is in charge and how it will be dealt with .

Contribution to knowledge

To inform my study of the process of problematisation of the Romani population and of the impacts of labelling, policy, and bureaucratic practice on the everyday lives, livelihoods, coping strategies and identity-making of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali forced migrants in Italy, I have built a theoretical framework which borrows from concepts and theories developed in different fields, including the anthropology of bureaucracy, policy, and the state; the sociology of social problems and labelling theory; critical policy analysis; and Foucauldian conceptualisations of power, knowledge and discourse; feminist perspectives on agency and processes of subjectivation; and current debates in sociology, politics, and geography on camps, citizenship, and spaces of exception. In the following pages, I will outline five areas where my study has brought an original contribution to knowledge.

Defining the Roma and the problem: labelling, framing, and policy making

The thesis has examined the relation between labelling, power, and discourse in the governance of the 'Gypsies' in Italy, providing an ethnography of the institutionalisation of labels through the policy process, the contribution of labels and labelling to the construction of 'social problems', and their operationalisation by bureaucrats and quasi-state actors.

My study has also explored the ways in which the 'objects' of discourse and of labelling experience the processes of bureaucratic categorisation and representation, thus engaging explicitly with the effects of representation as well as the ways in which the persons being represented position themselves in relation to, and are 'interpellated' by, these framing processes.

This examination has also revealed how the state apparatus, through its labels, policy, and bureaucratic practice, produces self-fulfilling prophecies and raises important questions about the room for manoeuvre of Roma and Ashkali within the dominant frame, the possibilities and spaces for challenging this frame, and how to account for the 'productive' nature of the policy process and the 'effects of realities' that it produces.

As shown in chapters 6, 7 and 8, the cases of Venice and Florence illustrate the complexity of the relationship between labelling, policy making, and implementation. They reveal how negotiation and contestation over the labelling of newcomers has been an ongoing process, with important policy and practice implications, especially in relation to the development and implementation of resettlement programmes.

The conflict over labels has surfaced several times over the years, especially corresponding to the arrival of displaced people from Yugoslavia, when, to an initial refusal by the authorities (or some of them) to apply the provisions of existing legislation regarding the protection of displaced people from former Yugoslavia to the Roma, the mobilisation of some activists, social workers, and sympathetic politicians persuaded the authorities to recognise the Roma as people in need of humanitarian protection. As a local politician in Venice pointed out, to 'reiterate continuously the idea that they were war victims' was a central part of the work of the local authority in Venice.

Performing the state: the agency of bureaucrats

To be honest with you, in some ways I regret that camps are no longer there. The camp is a special place, different. When you went there, it was like entering in a different world. I have some nice memories there: good time, dancing, eating, and

other things like these (senior social worker, f, Venice).

The thesis contributes to recent ethnographic research on bureaucracy, which stresses how the operationalisation of state orders is not a straightforward process, but on the contrary it is the result of negotiation and confrontation between different institutional actors and, increasingly, also with the involvement of non-institutional actors.

My work has documented the room for manoeuvre of front-line state and local government employees and how they can not only exert a significant influence on the implementation of public policies, but also contribute to the development of new ones with their 'suggestions' (social worker, F, Venice) and first-hand field knowledge. It is therefore important for researchers to pay attention to their understanding, approaches, agendas, and actions as a way of investigating the different configurations of the problematisation of the 'Gypsies'/nomads'.

In chapter 9, in particular, I have shown how certain field practices and methodologies developed by pioneer front-line workers over time taught the state some lessons that, gradually formalised, have provided a blueprint for managing the settlement of other migrant and refugee groups. However, I have also argued that intervening in what I defined as a relatively unmapped bureaucratic territory, characterised by the lack of institutional expertise and concrete knowledge concerning this population, also resulted in recourse to pre-existing knowledge about the mythical 'Gypsy' and a number of missed opportunities for regularisation of the legal status of Roma and Ashkali forced migrants.

Adapting, adjusting, resisting: the agency of Roma and Ashkali

I'm curious to see how they will cope with the new Immigration Law. If, once again, they find a way around it, I would nominate them for a study, because it is proof that they really have an incredible instinct for survival (social worker, f, Venice).

As I have shown in this thesis, public policy, bureaucratic labelling, and practices in which they have very little input in Italy as well as in Kosovo have played a central role in shaping and reshaping Romani identities. Ethnic identity is not a set of more or less fixed and pre-determined attributes, rather is a form of social organisation

which is produced and reproduced in interaction with, and in response to, dominant discourses and political and institutional opportunity structures. The recollection of the emergence of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians as political actors in Yugoslavia and specifically in Kosovo, has provided a powerful example of the complexity of processes of identity formation. Roma and Ashkali's accounts of their encounters with the nomad camp and the dominant discourse on 'Gypsies' showed that the arrival in Italy brought new challenges and opportunities to which they had to respond as part of their process of settlement in the new country.

Labels define, for those labelled as well as for those who label, the boundaries of the 'conversation', and the frame in which one's own possibility of action lies.

The analysis of the accounts of Kosovo Roma and Ashkali forced migrants informed my analysis of the encounter, if any, between two discursive and policy frameworks, one on 'Gypsy' and the other on 'refugees' in Florence and Venice. It has shed light on the different ways in which Roma and Ashkali engage with these sets of discourses, policy, and practice, and how they adjust to, adapt to, and/or oppose them.

The camp: technology of power and lived space

The analysis of the processes by which the Romani population in Italy is discursively and socially constructed as a social problem and has become a target of specific policy initiatives has revealed the 'crucial nexus' (Soja 1989) between the spatial, the social, and the political.

Drawing on ethnographic data collected in Tuscany and Veneto, the study shows the centrality of nomad camps in the governance of the 'Gypsy problem', emphasising in particular the production and reproduction of the dominant discourse through the camp, and in turn, in shaping the lives, social worlds, and opportunities of their inhabitants.

The analysis of the discourse on nomad camps is developed in three stages. The first stage was in the 1960s and 1970s, when 'nomad camps' first appeared in the public and policy debate as a response to the need of itinerant families without parking sites, who needed to be 'educated' to modernity. The second stage was the period

between the 1990s and early 2000s when, despite the transformation occurring within the Romani population in Italy with the arrival of Yugoslavian Roma, the discourse on 'nomads' persisted, entrenched in a culturalist frame, and produced hundreds of 'nomad camps' where displaced migrants from Yugoslavia found shelter, turning 'nomad camps' into *de facto* refugee camps. The final stage was the early 2000s, when the 'close down nomad camps' discourse emerged, supported by a broad and diverse range of social and political actors, but producing to date limited results.

Interviewees' accounts and ethnographic observations have informed my understanding of the complex dynamics of resistance and adaptation in nomad camps, and revealed an ambiguous relationship that links the inhabitants of camps to those who manage the camps, as well as the capacity of adaptation of the inhabitants to the limited resources available to them.

'Campzenship' as a form of segmented and situated citizenship

Agamben's conceptualisation of camps as spaces of exception, Bauman's invitation to look at camps not as exceptions but rather as products of modernity and warehouses for the 'excess of humanity', and Balibar's reconceptualisation of European citizenship vis-à-vis the proliferations of internal borders, have provided an engaging theoretical terrain on which to explore the nomad camp and the specific rules, regulations, rights, and entitlements that govern the lives of its inhabitants, and its role in the broader polity.

Drawing on the accounts of camp residents and ethnographic observation, I have put forward the concept of 'campzenship' as a way to capture the specific and situated form of citizenship produced by the camp. The camp offered to newcomers from Kosovo, who had limited access to state provisions for displaced people, the 'comfort of exceptionality', by providing them with (some kind of) protection and legal recognition, as well as practical assistance.

This more 'benign' aspect of camps is often overlooked in scholarship that tends to emphasise only the segregating and exclusionary nature of camps, and portrays them exclusively as spaces of control over a group of people deemed to represent a

threat to society. But camps are also much more: they are spaces of everyday life, where social networks, affiliations, and informal exchanges provide an alternative support mechanism in a situation marked by widespread anti-Gypsyism, public hostility, precarious entitlements, and conditional rights.

To acknowledge the 'double' nature of camps, I have argued in chapter 10, can positively contribute to the current debate on alternative housing solutions for residents of camps, and can provide some insights into the failure of projects supporting the resettlement of Roma outside nomad camps.

Areas and directions for further research

In this final section, I will highlight some research themes and activities which have emerged out of my doctoral research. Some of these ideas are already at an advanced stage of development; others are longer term research goals.

Kosovo Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians (RAE) in Post-Independence Kosovo: State building and the 'other minorities' issue

Socio-economic indicators and human rights reports all suggest that the situation of RAE minorities in Kosovo is extremely severe and that limited improvements have occurred since the end of the conflict ten years ago. The 'forgotten victims' of the war are now forgotten citizens of the new independent Kosovo.

This research theme investigates:

- the governance of the 'other minorities' (i.e. non-Serbian) in contemporary Kosovo and, in particular, the issue of migration and return (and related demographic and political implications) in the context of the overall process of state building in Kosovo, paying attention in particular to the role of the EU and international agencies.
- the experience of RAE activists caught not only in-between multiple and conflicting agendas and structures – namely the official Kosovo government, the Serbian parallel structures and the international community – but also are under pressure from the Kosovo RAE diaspora that fears *en mass* forced return to Kosovo.

- the conflicting and competing models of state and nation championed by the Albanian leadership, the EU, and a number of international agencies respectively.

Pilot fieldwork was conducted in Kosovo between March and July 2008 when I carried out field visits to the largest RAE settlements and conducted thirty semi-structured interviews with Romani activists, politicians, and civil servants. I also interviewed representatives of the Kosovo government and international agencies.

Romani mobilities and political mobilisation in Contemporary Europe

This research theme would bring together two research projects I have engaged in over the last few years: the co-editing of the book 'Romani politics in contemporary Europe: poverty, ethnic mobilization and the neoliberal order' (with Dr Nidhi Trehan); and my current project on the governance of Romani mobility and migration in Europe. The idea for the second of these projects has developed out of an Experts' Hearing of the Council of Europe High Commissioner for Human Rights on Roma movements in Europe to which I was invited in September 2008. At this event participants recognised the need for interdisciplinary and scholarly-sound research on Romani migration and settlement in Europe, stressing how current work on the topic is mainly policy- and advocacy- driven, narrowly focused, and lacking in depth of analysis. The main aim of this project is to map the variety and directions of contemporary Romani movements into, out of, and within the EU, including both economic and 'forced' migration as well as forced or voluntary repatriation. More specifically, the project has the following key objectives:

- to investigate the relationship between indigenous Romani population in Western Europe and the newly arrived Romani migrants
- to interrogate, through the Roma case, the concept and practice of freedom of movement in the EU
- to explore Romani politics in the enlarged EU: international NGOs, Roma elite, and grass-root activism.

The first activity of this research project is the organisation of an international conference on 'Romani mobilities in Europe: multidisciplinary perspectives' (14-15 January 2010, Oxford) which will provide an overview of the state-of-the-art scholarly research in the field and facilitate the development of collaborative projects with other scholars in Europe.

Ethnographic studies of camp and camp-like institutions

In the last few years, there has been a rich and articulated scholarly debate on camps and camp-like institutions, mainly from sociological and political science perspectives. However, this debate is lacking empirical evidence and, even more, a qualitative understanding of how inmates experience life in camps and camp-like institutions and also of the broader effects of camps on their livelihoods, coping strategies, and processes of subjectivation. In the thesis, I have engaged with this debate and put forward the concept of 'campzanship' as a way of capturing the process of transformation of European citizenship and the ambiguous nature of camps as places of control, but also of anonymity, protection, and recognition.

Anthropology of legal status

Over the last two years, I have been working as a senior researcher on a research project on young undocumented migrants in Britain. Built around the voices of 75 migrants from five different countries (Brazil, China, Ukraine, Zimbabwe, and Kurds from Turkey), this research has captured a complex reality, moving between the uniqueness of the individual experience and the search for patterns and commonalities across migrants' accounts of their everyday lives and experiences. The research has enabled me to engage more closely with the literature on undocumentedness and the impact of legal status on migrants' everyday lives and coping strategies. Some of the findings of this research have helped me re-evaluate my own understanding of the impact of legal status on Roma and Ashkali forced migrants in Italy. I would like to develop this idea further and explore comparatively how migrants cope with undocumentedness, and also the different configurations of undocumentedness and its governance.

Coda

This study has shown that the ambiguity embedded in the label 'Gypsy problem' – 'the problems of gypsies' or 'the Gypsies as a problem' – mirrors the ambiguity of the Italian discourse, policies, and practices towards the Romani population. The label 'Gypsy problem' makes possible the reconciliation of apparently conflicting policy objectives: on the one hand, security and control and, on the other, social assistance and the protection of cultural diversity.

The much contested and (rightly) criticized shift towards a zero tolerance rhetoric against the 'nomads' by the Italian government that has dominated public debate in Italy since 2007 has altered the balance between control and assistance towards control. However, it has not produced a change of paradigm in Italian policy and practice towards the Romani population, since the objective of 'helping' the Roma is still there, although within a more assimilationist undertone. The Minister of the Interior illustrates this in the following quote from a parliamentary debate (2 July 2008) on the decree n. 122/2008 which declares 'the state of emergency in relation to nomad camps':

The decree aims to promote the social integration of these people, with specific measures to assist minors, and to monitor the initiatives implemented in authorised nomad camps for promoting schooling and vocational training. I think that this decree is a laudable initiative, which aspires on the one hand to stop the indecency of illegal nomad camps and, on the other, to guarantee the security of Italian citizens, but also of the minors who live in the camps (Maroni 2008: 1).

However, even if the basic (ontological) duality of the 'Gypsy problem' persists, what has changed is the hierarchy of institutional actors governing the issue. In fact, through the emergency decree, the central government has advocated to itself the executive power of control and the coordination of policy concerning the 'Gypsy problem', transforming what was until 2007 predominantly a local and regional issue into a pillar of the political agenda on security of the central government (Sigona 2010).

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