



# The contentious sovereignties of the camp: Political contention among state and non-state actors in Italian Roma camps



Gaja Maestri <sup>1</sup>

Department of Geography, Durham University, Science Laboratories, South Rd, Durham DH1 3LE, United Kingdom

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## ABSTRACT

The global proliferation of camps manifests an alarming phenomenon of burgeoning marginalization, and shows that the concept of ‘camp’ is today increasingly crucial to grapple with current changes in the world’s geographies of exclusion and inclusion. Specifically, this article focuses on ‘institutional camps’, i.e. created by government agencies in alleged emergency situations and aims to conceptualize sovereignty over this type of camp. After critically reviewing the ongoing scholarly debate on camp sovereignty, I situate my approach within the work of scholars who see political authority over the camp as comprising a multiplicity of both state and non-state actors. The article contributes to this perspective by drawing on the theory of ‘contentious politics’ advanced by [McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly \(2001\)](#). Through this analytical framework, I suggest construing camp sovereignties as contentious, i.e. inherently constituted by conflicting and ever-evolving power relations that change according to framing strategies, political opportunities, resources and repertoires of action. In order to show the benefits of such approach, the paper focuses on the empirical case of the Italian Roma camps in Rome, through which I show that camp sovereignty is not only fragmented into a multiplicity of actors but is also the result of conflict, compromise, negotiation, and co-optation among actors whose frames, opportunities, resources, and repertoires constantly change over time.

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## 1. Introduction

The current proliferation of camps globally has attracted increasing attention among scholars, including geographers, who have interrogated their diffusion and governance, as well as the everyday practices of the people living in these socio-political spatial formations. In addition to refugee camps and immigration detention centers, new hotspots, asylum seekers centers, and migrant identification facilities are quickly mushrooming as a response to the so-called European ‘migration crisis’ ([Davies & Isakjee, 2015](#)). This growth manifests an alarming phenomenon of burgeoning marginalization, and shows how the concept of ‘camp’ and what [Minca \(2015b\)](#) has on the pages of this journal described as “camp studies” are today increasingly crucial to grapple with current social changes in the world’s geographies of exclusion and inclusion.

This article arises from [Minca’s \(2015b, p.80\)](#) call for “spatial

theories that might help us understand the actual workings of the camp” – also echoed by [Davies and Isakjee \(2015\)](#) – and aims to contribute to the analysis of camp governance. In so doing, the question addressed in this paper is: how can we conceptualize sovereignty in institutional camps? Drawing on scholarly work that suggests seeing camp sovereignty as plural and hybrid, I will focus on the contentious nature of camp sovereignties. The perspective put forward in this article foregrounds the interaction between state and non-state actors governing the camp and the dynamic nature of their relationships, which constantly change over time, fluctuating between conflict and cooperation. I will do so by using the analytical tools developed by [McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly \(2001\)](#) in their theory of ‘dynamics of contention’, which focuses on framing strategies, political opportunities, resources and repertoires of action as key aspects in the interaction between the actors involved in the camp. Overall, through this article I intend to show the usefulness of this framework in the analysis of camp governance, not only because it underscores multiplicity but because it also emphasizes a temporal perspective, deepening the understanding of the historical evolution of camp sovereignties.

In the first section of the article I will examine the meaning of

E-mail address: [g.maestri@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:g.maestri@leicester.ac.uk).

<sup>1</sup> Permanent address: University of Leicester, School of Media, Communication and Sociology, University Rd, Leicester LE1 7RH, United Kingdom.

“institutional camp” to specify the scope of my argument. I will then consider the literature on camp governance, focusing on how the political authority over institutional camps has been conceptualized. After reviewing Agamben-inspired works, which stress the role of the sovereign state decision in the creation of camps, and those that draw on the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, I will discuss the current understanding of camp sovereignty, which scholars have recently suggested to see as layered (Turner, 2005), multiple (Hanafi & Long, 2010), and hybrid (Ramadan & Fregonese, 2017). By building on these debates, in the second section I will expose the theory of political contention advanced by McAdam et al. (2001) and suggest construing camp sovereignty as contentious, i.e. inherently constituted by ever-evolving power relations among claim-makers whose frames, opportunities, resources, and repertoires change over time. To show the benefits of such perspective, the third and fourth sections of the paper present an analysis of the Italian Roma camps, which shows how the sovereignty over the camp is not only fragmented into a multiplicity of actors but is also the result of constant conflict, compromise, and co-optation.

The data presented in this paper have been collected in Rome from September to December 2013. During the fieldwork, I conducted 60 in-depth interviews and informal conversations with a variety of actors (both governmental and non-governmental) participating in the governance of the Roma camps, i.e. policy-makers, politicians, members of subcontracting associations, advocacy volunteers and activists of social movements. In addition to this, I analyzed 22 policy documents, including local ordinances, council deliberations, policy guidelines, documents of the local police, regional and national legal texts, and policy reports. Through the interviews and conversations, I identified the conflicting views and claims made by different actors, how these were framed, the resources mobilized (such as alliances), and the opportunities and repertoires of action. The analysis of the policy documents enabled me to trace the historical development of the Italian Roma camps, with a specific focus on their definitions, objectives, and target population, which provided an understanding of the context within which the actors involved in the camp governance operate. As I will show in the article, these interviews and documents clearly highlight the complex and contentious nature of sovereignty over institutional camps.

## 2. The governance of institutional camps in camp studies

Scholars working on the camp have highlighted the multifaceted dimension of this spatial formation (Hailey, 2009), which includes camps for refugees (Agier, 2014), semi-carceral institutions, like migration detention centers (Moran, Gill, & Conlon, 2013) and EU hotspots (Squire, 2016), spaces of transit (Davies & Isakjee, 2015) and of sanctuary (Czajka, 2012), protest camps (Brown, Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2017) and, some argue (Diken & Laustsen, 2005), gated communities. For this reason, as Hailey (2009, p.1) points out, “[d]efining the camp is a central problem of our contemporary moment”. Broadly speaking, a camp can be defined as a temporary confined space, characterized by an exceptional and ambiguous status between exclusion and protection (see Minca, 2015b). Camps differ, however, in a series of other aspects. For example, while migration detention centers can be regarded as a form of forced segregation, gated communities are usually seen as a case of self-segregation. Secondly, those living in sanctuary spaces or gated communities are represented as needing protection, whereas those in identification and removal centers are seen as a potential threat to the nation state order. Finally, despite their official temporariness, camps have different durations. While refugee camps often persist and become a temporal limbo of

governmental inertia, “autonomous camps” (Hailey, 2009), such as informal settlements or protest camps, fight for extending their duration.

This article is concerned with one specific set of camps: institutional camps which are officially created and managed by governmental agencies in alleged emergency situations and which forcibly segregate (often ethnically) stigmatized subjects for a protracted period of time. As observed by Minca (2015a, p.90–91), there is a difference between “state-enforced camps” and “counter-camps” (i.e. “spontaneously created by refugees or migrants-on-the-move”). Drawing on this distinction, this article will focus on state-enforced camps. It will not deal with carceral spaces, such as immigration removal centers, but it will specifically focus on camps that are used as a form of “forced housing” (*logement contraint*) for undesirable categories (Bernardot, 2005), such as migrants or ethnic minorities. The former can be included in what Hailey (2009) terms “control camps”, and the latter are part of what he terms “necessity camps”, which “offer accommodation, assistance, and protection” (Hailey, 2009, p.323). These are, for example, migrant accommodation such as the *cités de transit* used in France to house people originally from Algeria and Morocco in the 1960s–1980s (see Bernardot, 2005), asylum seekers' residential accommodation, such as the *Wohnheim* in Germany (see Fontanari, 2015), homeless camps (see Herring & Lutz, 2015), as well as contemporary Gypsy camps, such as the *villages d'insertion* in France (see Legros, 2010) and the *campi rom* in Italy (see Sigona, 2005).

There are two main theoretical approaches that have significantly marked the analysis of the governance of institutional camps. The first one is informed by the work of Agamben, while the second draws on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality. Many scholars in international relations have resorted to the work of Agamben (1998, 2005) to understand the spreading of camp-like institutions (Edkins, 2000), mostly after 9/11 (see, for instance, Ek, 2006; Gregory, 2006; Minca, 2005, 2015b). The main contribution of an Agambenian approach lies in understanding the camp as the spatialization of exception, i.e. the suspension of ordinary law. These spaces are characterized by ambiguity, or “indistinction” (Agamben, 1998; see; Agier, 2014; Diken & Laustsen, 2005; Giaccaria & Minca, 2011), as the state of exception entails an erasure of the clear-cut distinction between political life and biological existence, producing a state of “bare life” whereby the “homo sacer” can be subject to violence with impunity. According to Agamben (1998), who draws on Schmitt's work, the sovereign manifests itself through the decision of who counts as bare life. However, the fact that Agamben draws on the Schmittian notion of sovereignty as “decisionist state power” (Brown, 2010, p. 48), i.e. the executive power as opposed to the legal one, makes his analysis strongly state-centered. As a result, he does not offer a nuanced and detailed account of how the exception as a governing logic and its spatialization are put into action through a variety of actors beyond the state. For this reason, he was criticized for overlooking the complexity of the sovereign agencies and equating the political domain with the legal (see Amore, 2013; Gregory, 2006; Martin, 2015; Ramadan, 2013), as well as for dismissing the capacity of resistance of the subjects confined in the camp (see Butler & Spivak, 2007; Gregory, 2006).

In contrast, the Foucauldian approach to the camp embraces the complexity of power through the notion of governmentality, which offers an alternative to state-centered understandings (Lippert, 1999). Governmentality can be defined as an “ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics” (Foucault, 1991, p. 102) enabling the exercise of power. It rejects the idea of a single state and static sovereign actor (see Hanafi & Long, 2010) and it underscores the interactions

between a plurality of rationalities and technologies of power, which also produce subjectivities (Lippert, 1999; Walters, 2015). According to this view, power is not a property but circulates and emanates both from governmental institutions and from non-governmental ones – many of which are often quite critical of the state, like civil society associations or social movements (Walters, 2015). Following this approach, scholars in refugee studies have conceived the camp as a governmental technology and spatial containment, functioning as a disciplinary and ordering device (Hyndman, 2000; Malkki, 1995). However, the camp is not only a disciplinary space but also a biopolitical instrument. Indeed, through forms of knowledge production (such as census and medical statistics) refugees are produced as silent and passive subjects (Peteet, 2005; Rajaram, 2002). Moreover, through a humanitarianism discourse, ambiguously situated between care and control, refugees are presented as needing the help of others to become empowered and to develop a feeling of community (Bulley, 2014; Hyndman, 2000; Turner, 2005). As observed by Lippert (1999, p. 295), “[i]n the governmentality literature, the state is seen less as an actor and more as a historical effect, resultant, or residue of certain governmental practices.” In contrast with the work of Agamben, this perspective foregrounds the plurality of governing agencies and the variety of tools of government (both discourses and material technologies), constituting what externally appears as a unitary subject, such as the state.<sup>2</sup>

These two perspectives are, however, not necessarily opposite (see Brown, 2006; Butler, 2004). The notion of governmentality can indeed help us understanding that what is presented as state sovereignty, in an Agambenian perspective, is in fact the resulting effect of multiple and interacting actors governing the camp. By drawing on the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, for instance, Butler (2004, p. 61) argues that sovereignty is enabled by a set of administrative procedures carried out by what she calls “petty sovereigns” (Butler, 2004, p.56) that, in different ways, contribute to the suspension of the ordinary legal order. Furthermore, the notion of governmentality has also been used to stress the role of non-state actors in the production of what is presented as state sovereignty. With reference to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, Hanafi and Long (2010, p. 14) observe that the camp is shaped by “a tapestry of multiple, partial sovereignties”, which have de facto suspended all sovereign authority and implemented temporary and emergency powers. The idea of “multiple, partial sovereignties” (Hanafi & Long, 2010, p. 14) is very close to other conceptualizations of sovereignty developed by critics of Agamben's perspective on camps. For instance, Turner (2005, p. 330) defines the sovereignty in the camp as “layered”, whereby various actors advance different and competing claims. Ramadan (2013, p. 67) suggests approaching the space of the camp as an “assemblage of people, institutions, organizations, the built environment and the relations between them”. Drawing on Fregonese's (2012) work on Lebanon's “hybrid sovereignties”, Ramadan (2013, p. 72) also underscores the “fractured, hybrid sovereignty practices” characterizing the camp. In a later article, Ramadan and Fregonese (2017, p. 950), with reference to the case of

Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, elaborate further the notion of “hybrid sovereignties”, which indicates a composite of state and non-state actors that compete but also collaborate to control refugee camps. They also advocate a historical perspective on “changing camp sovereignties” (Ramadan & Fregonese, 2017, p. 954) to understand the “complex realm of hybrid sovereignty arrangements” (Ramadan & Fregonese, 2017, p.950). Through different concepts and case studies, these works underscore the multiplicity and heterogeneity of camp sovereignty, which comprises both state and non-state actors, making a plurality of often contrasting claims and characterized by a variety of interactions spanning from collaboration to conflict.

Building on these approaches highlighting the plural, layered, and hybrid nature of what is performed as a unitary state sovereignty over institutional camps, in the next section I will suggest viewing these multiple sovereignties of the camp as ‘contentious’. By drawing on the notion of ‘contentious politics’, emerged in the field of social movement studies, I will argue that camp sovereignty is constituted by a plurality of state and non-state actors, both collaborating and competing with the state, and – as suggested by Ramadan and Fregonese (2017) – that the relationships between these actors are never fixed but historically evolve. An understanding of these changes is fundamental to grasp the historical development of persisting camps, and a reading of camp sovereignties as contentious can contribute to this by focusing on the framing strategies actors develop, the opportunities they create, the resources they mold and mobilize, and the repertoires they adopt.

### 3. Hybrid camp sovereignties and political contention

Under the label ‘state sovereignty’ not only is there a composite assemblage of state and non-state actors – as pointed out by the scholars discussed above – but also a plurality of conflicting interactions that evolve over time. I decided to turn to the notion of political contention because, as I will show, it offers a useful terminology to describe these conflicting interactions. This theory synthesizes much of the concepts developed in social movement studies. This field of research emerged in the 1950s and 1960s and focused on so-called unconventional political participation, such as protests, in contrast to political science, which considered more formalized types of political participation, like voting (McAdam et al., 2001). I contend that to study sovereignty through the tools conceived for the analysis of actors that were historically construed as exogenous (and opposite) to the state and the policy process (see Meyer, Jenness, & Ingram, 2005) can be productive because it bypasses the assumption of a presumed unity of the sovereign and its equation with state agencies.

Contentious politics can be broadly defined as a type of “collective political struggle” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 5) in which a series of actors (at least one of which is the government) make claims that affect the interest of the other parties. The analysis of dynamic of contention was proposed by McAdam et al. (2001) and draws on previous theories developed in social movement studies, namely, framing processes (see Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986), repertoires of contention (see Tilly, 1986), resources mobilization (see Mayer & McCarthy, 1977), and political opportunity structure (see Tarrow, 1998). These concepts were developed to overcome the limitations of previous research on protests, which mainly stressed the irrationality of collective behavior, seen as an impulsive expression of grievances (McAdam et al., 2001). Moreover, these accounts could not explain why in different situations individuals who share grievances did not act on it (McAdam et al., 2001). For these reasons, scholars in social movement studies started to look at this form of collective action as the result of a rational mobilization of resources (not only material

<sup>2</sup> Although a Foucauldian approach of the camp offers a more complex understanding of the Agambenian sovereign power, both accounts are underpinned by a “theological” understanding of sovereignty (Brown, 2010, p. 61). As a result, they both reproduce a binary opposition between the sovereign (either single or plural) that excludes, disciplines and controls, and the camp residents who are portrayed as “victims of violence, unable to overcome their trauma and becoming passive recipients of aid and charity” (Sanyal, 2011, p. 885). While I agree with this point, this article focuses on the concept of sovereignty in the camp and will not therefore deal with this criticism, which generated alternative conceptualization of the camps (see Redclift, 2013; Rygiel, 2011; Sigona, 2015).



but also socio-organizational, such as networks and skills). In addition to this, movements are faced with differing opportunities present in the institutional political context, which either facilitate or repress the mobilization of resources. Opportunities, however, vary depending on the framing strategies developed by a social movement, as well as by the repertoires adopted, which are culturally and historically specific. The theory on dynamics of contention advanced by [McAdam et al. \(2001\)](#) injects some dynamism and fluidity into this analysis, by understanding resources, opportunities, framings and repertoires relationally. They argue that there are no objective opportunities and threats to political mobilization but they are the outcomes of specific framing strategies, which, however, never depend only on the intentions of the movement but are deeply influenced by other actors – like the media and the polity. Likewise, resources and mobilization structures can be constructed by actors and are embedded in political and historical contexts. They also add that framing processes are always collective and interactive, including both the movement, their opponents and the surrounding actors. Finally, repertoires of contention cannot simplistically be divided into conventional and unconventional, as the extent to which they are considered innovative is the result of the attention they receive from the actors involved in a contentious situation.

This approach presents three major improvements of previous theories on political contention. Firstly, while the disciplinary division between so-called conventional and unconventional forms of politics has mostly disappeared, there is still a fragmentation in the language used to refer to similar political phenomena, such as revolutions, social movements, and interest groups ([McAdam et al., 2001](#)). In contrast, the theory on dynamics of contention aims to offer a common terminology and analytical tools to describe all these seemingly different situations, which are, however, very similar as they consist in a series of actors making claims against each other ([McAdam et al., 2001](#)). Secondly, [McAdam et al. \(2001, p. 7\)](#) propose to replace the notion of “institutional” and “unconventional” politics with “contained” and “transgressive” contention, whereby the former consists in routinized forms of mobilization, regardless of their formal institutionalization, while the latter denotes those perceived as innovative. Therefore, this allows to overcome the formal distinction between incumbent actors and challengers, and to “emphasize transgression within institutions as well as the many routine activities of external challengers” ([McAdam et al., 2001, p.7](#)). Thirdly, as mentioned earlier, to consider the different aspects of political contention (i.e. resources, frames, repertoires, and opportunities) as fluid and relationally constituted enables us to develop a dynamic understanding of political conflicting situations involving governmental and non-governmental actors.

Precisely for these three reasons, I believe that political contention can offer a useful analytical framework to understand camp sovereignties. Indeed, the segregation in camps can be seen as the product of different episodes of (both contained and transgressive) contentious politics, whereby various actors (including non-governmental ones) make contrasting claims. As I will show in the analysis of the Roma camps in the city of Rome, the political authority of the government over these spaces is, in fact, entangled in a series of conflicts between different actors that contribute to govern this space. Moreover, as highlighted by scholars employing the concept of governmentality (see [Walters, 2015](#)), the actors involved in a contentious situation cannot be simply labelled as either collaborating or opposing governmental decisions. This will be manifest in the case of the Roma camps, where over a thirty-year period actors have significantly changed their positions. Further to this, not only is it impossible to clearly differentiate those supporting from those criticizing the state, but even more so as the

resources, frames, opportunities and repertoires of action are never fixed but constantly evolving. For example, all these aspects have considerably mutated in the last three decades and hence affected the power position of the actors involved in the production of the Roma camps. Overall, this approach aims to reverse the perspective on sovereignty: if sovereignty is a name given to an effect (see [Butler, 2004](#)) produced by a multiplicity and variety of often conflicting actors and actions, I contend that it is heuristically fruitful to approach it from an analysis of the interactions of the very different parts constituting it.

#### 4. The Roma camps in Rome

Amongst European countries, Italy is where Roma<sup>3</sup> households are most at risk of poverty and where a large slice of the Roma population faces discrimination in housing ([European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2012](#)). It is estimated that approximately 40,000 Roma, i.e. almost one-third of the entire Roma population in Italy, experience severe housing deprivation, living in informal settlements and official camps ([Dalla Zuanna, 2013](#)). Within Italy, Rome is the city where this situation is most alarming. According to official figures provided by the municipality of Rome, approximately seven thousand Roma live in 18 institutional camps run by the local government. These camps are equipped with small Portakabins or caravans where Roma families live, and facilities – such as drinking water, toilets and electricity. In addition to this, subcontracting NGOs provide a series of services in the camp, from internal surveillance and security to so-called “socio-educational” activities for the residents, mainly student transport and recreational activities for children.

The Lazio Region (where Rome is situated) adopted a law on the protection of Roma culture in 1985, which included the creation of halting sites for Roma Travellers ([Regione Lazio, 1985](#)). However, camps for Roma people were introduced in the city of Rome only in the first half of the 1990s, with the arrival of Roma asylum seekers during the Yugoslav Wars. Between 1992 and 2000, approximately 16,000 Roma arrived in Italy from former Yugoslavia, escaping the war ([UNAR, 2012](#)). Many of them did not receive any protection because were believed to be nomads ([Sigona, 2003](#)) and many others found themselves in a limbo of statelessness that made it difficult both to apply for a visa in Italy and to return to their country of origin ([Hein, 2000](#)). In this situation, an increasing number of Roma were thus obliged to find provisional and precarious shelters in informal settlements (see [ECRI, 2002](#); [Sigona, 2015](#)). In order to tackle this alleged emergency situation, the municipality of Rome decided to use the halting sites created for Roma Travellers in 1985 as camps to temporarily relocate Roma asylum seekers evicted from informal settlements. Even though the initial intention was to offer temporary accommodation to Roma slum dwellers, these camps have persisted until today and have worsened the marginalization of this group. Roma living in these overcrowded camps (some camps host more than one thousand people) experience difficult access to work, healthcare, education, and housing and the camp exacerbates their residential segregation, isolation, and territorial stigma, in addition to poor hygiene

<sup>3</sup> The term “Roma” refers to a highly heterogeneous ethnic group and I appreciate that any naming practice comes with advantages and limitations (see [Maestri, 2017a](#)). However, since this article is concerned with the spatial governance of this category, I will employ the term Roma to name those who are regarded as such by policymakers. Moreover, this term is widely accepted as non-derogatory and non-discriminatory by several, both Roma and non-Roma, institutional, non-governmental and advocacy organizations. “Roma” here designates both Romani and non-Romani-speaking communities. I will use “Roma Travellers” when referring to Roma considered to be nomadic.

and safety conditions.

Piasere (2006) was one of the first scholars to adopt an Agambenian perspective on these spaces. He suggested that the Roma camps are ambiguous apparatuses of inclusion through exclusion (often justified by humanitarian purposes), where the Roma are stripped of their citizenship and are reduced to what he terms “*campodini*”, i.e. subjects of the camp (Piasere, 2006, p.14). Indeed, the Roma camps have been characterized since their creation by a strong ambiguity: they combine logics of care and control (see Daniele, 2012) and they also present blurred temporal boundaries, unclear policy objectives and an ambivalent definition of their target population. As emerged from an analysis of the policy documents, there is no explicit definition of who is entitled to relocation in Roma camps. For example, the terms “nomads” and “Roma” are used almost interchangeably (see *Comune di Roma, 1993; Regione Lazio, 1985*). Furthermore, the documents do not clearly specify the purpose of Roma camps. At times, they are presented as permanent housing solutions for nomadic Roma, for instance in the 1985 law that established the creation of halting sites (*Regione Lazio, 1985*). However, in the same document and in later ones (see *Comune di Roma, 1999*), the camps are also presented as transitional accommodation towards a sedentary lifestyle for non-nomadic Roma. In 2002, with the intent to elucidate these murky definitions, the municipality of Rome explicitly stated that the main objective of the Roma camps was a “gradual exit of families from villages [i.e. Roma camps] towards a stable housing solution” (*Comune di Roma, 2002, p.208*), hence confirming the transitory character of these spaces, which were conceived as an “incubator” of “social and cultural integration” (*Comune di Roma, 2002*). Yet, despite this clarifying attempt, this regulation was never applied, with the result that still today there is no legal framework for these camps, where more than seven thousand Roma are caught in a temporary yet permanent state of exclusion.

A number of scholars have investigated the segregation of the Roma in Italian institutional camps, using both an Agambenian and a Foucauldian approach. Alunni (2012, p. 8) has argued that “Agamben’s theories seem to fit particularly well in the field of studies on the situation of Roma in Europe, particularly in Italy”. More precisely, the Roma camp has been described as a space of exception (Legros & Vitale, 2011), produced by a national response to an alleged humanitarian emergency (Sigona, 2005). The situation of the Roma camps was analyzed through the notion of exception also by Clough Marinaro (2009), who illustrates the logic of confinement and containment that is perpetuating the seclusion of this stigmatized ethnic minority. Other scholars, drawing on Foucault, have defined the camp as a widely-supported “spatio-racial political technology” (Picker, Greenfields, & Smith, 2015, p. 742), rooted in colonial technologies of governance and racist ideologies. Within the same approach, the camp has been defined as a tool of “state-driven sedentarization” (Picker et al., 2015, p.741), supported by a specific material and discursive apparatus – in the Foucauldian sense of an ensemble of the “said” and the “unsaid”, with a strategic function (Foucault, 1980, p. 194; Picker, 2015). One of the main discourses bolstering segregation in camps is humanitarianism, which has been read through what Foucault terms “pastoral care” and which constructs the Roma as the Other through different practices of protection (Clough Marinaro & Daniele, 2014). Researchers have also underscored the multiplicity of actors shaping the Italian Roma camps as a way to criticize the limitations of the Agambenian view (see Armillei, 2015; Miele, 2016).

In the next section I will illustrate how a conceptualization of sovereignty as contentious can fruitfully contribute to these accounts, by showing how the power relations between the plurality of actors governing the Roma camps have evolved in the last three

decades. A variety of scholars have highlighted the limitations of an Agambenian approach and stressed the crucial role played by a multiplicity of non-state actors in the camp governance. In order to further enrich this view, I suggest seeing camp sovereignty not only as multiple, “layered” (Turner, 2005) and “hybrid” (Ramadan & Fregonese, 2017) but also as an effect of political contention between actors that interact by developing framing processes, exploiting opportunities, mobilizing resources, and adopting repertoires of action, all of which constantly change over time.

## 5. The Roma camp contentious sovereignties

Roma camps in Rome – as in many other cities in Italy – are characterized by an exceptional status. They were created by the government (both local and national) during alleged emergency situations, and still today are not regulated by any legal framework. This would seem to support an Agambenian reading, whereby camp dwellers are confined to an extra-legal space created by the decision of the sovereign state (at various scales). However, the Roma camps are shaped by a plurality of both state and non-state actors that participate in different ways in their design, implementation, and also in their contestation. This shows how what is presented as the ‘state decision’ over these spaces is in fact a composite of different governing practices and actors. The Italian state, the municipality of Rome, as well as more recently the European Commission, are all institutional actors involved in the governance of these camps. Pro-Roma associations have also played a crucial role in the Roma camps since their outset in the early 1990s (see Sigona, 2011). They contributed to the creation of these camps as spaces of minority protection, advocating the right to roam for Roma Travellers, and still today are directly involved in the management of these spaces, many of them as subcontractors delivering services to the camp residents (see Daniele, 2011). Furthermore, there are also human rights groups and social movements that are against Roma segregation and that – although not officially – contribute to camp governance through advocacy work, the organization of protests, and lobbying for the dismantlement of the Roma camps.

The conflict between actors with very different claims has crucially shaped the debate around the Roma camps since the early 1990s, when the informal Roma settlements started to be framed as a political problem in the city of Rome. At the time, there was no protection for Roma asylum seekers. On top of this, the local municipality did not offer specific social services for marginalized people, leaving this mainly to voluntary-based associations (Costamagna, 2013), and immigration policies were characterized by an ad hoc and emergency approach due to unclear national policy guidelines (Alexander, 2003). With the arrival of Roma asylum seekers in the 1990s, the municipality of Rome adopted the Roma camps as a temporary solution to remedy the unpreparedness of asylum and welfare policies. The halting sites for Roma Travellers established in 1985 (*Regione Lazio, 1985*) were then used to temporarily re-house Roma asylum seekers living in informal settlements (a decision based on the misconception that the Roma are nomads). Resorting to temporary camps instead of more long-term accommodation solutions allowed the local government to find an immediate solution to these problems and enabled them to reconcile a series of conflicting views. The origin of the Roma camps can indeed be seen as the result of a contained contentious interaction between a multiplicity of actors which framed their claims in different ways. First, those advocating the right to roam of Roma Travellers and the creation of halting sites, who turned to a minority rights discourse, like the Opera Nomadi, the oldest pro-Roma national association in Italy. Secondly, those supporting the protection of the Roma who resorted to a humanitarianism discourse,

supported for instance by the Catholic Church (Corriere della Sera, 1995a). Finally, those who insisted on the control and confinement of this ethnic group, such as both left and right-wing mayors (Corriere della Sera, 1994b, 1995b, 1995c) and resident associations (Corriere della Sera, 1994a), whose security concerns were facilitated by a discourse of securitization of migration at the EU level (Finotelli & Sciortino, 2009; Huysmans, 2000). In contrast with Agamben-inspired readings, the Roma camps were not created by a unitary sovereign state decision but by a plethora of actors that, through different claims and more or less intentionally, created the Roma camps as they are today: protracted confined spaces, ambiguously sitting between protection and control. This shows that what was observed in other camps by Turner (2005), Hanafi and Long (2010) and Ramadan and Fregonese (2017) holds true for the Italian Roma camps too. Even though these are institutional camps, in the sense that they were created by the government in a situation of “necessity” (see Hailey, 2009), the state is far from being the only political authority over the camp, as this space is deeply marked by conflict and negotiation. Furthermore, the power relations between all these actors are not static but are constantly evolving according to various resources, framing strategies, opportunities and repertoires.

### 5.1. Pro-Roma NGOs: from Roma advocacy to co-option

While, at the beginning, non-governmental actors managed to influence the local government and accomplished their goal of relocating Roma slum dwellers to temporary camps, over time they were increasingly incorporated into the institutional Roma camp governance and simultaneously toned down their demand for Roma housing inclusion. Since the creation of the Roma camps in Rome in the early 1990s, some pro-Roma associations have been included in board meetings and in the management of camps. For instance, the municipality of Rome outsources the provision of services in the Roma camps to subcontractors, from surveillance and management activities to social services for the integration of the camp residents. However, the incorporation of pro-Roma NGOs affected their framing strategies and resources. Indeed, pro-Roma NGOs working in the Roma camps as service providers have slowly assumed a pragmatic and managerial approach. Even if most of them acknowledge the limitations and the potential negative effects that the camps have on the inclusion of the Roma, during interviews it emerged that they also stress their positive and practical aspects. For example, an interviewee working for a subcontracting association acknowledged the improvements that the camp brought to the life of many Roma slum dwellers, framing the camp as a pragmatic solution:

Before 1994 the Roma camps didn't exist but there were slums where people camped out, with just one water fountain and a few chemical toilets. At the beginning of the 1990s, the camps were created and these situations were repaired. [Interview, 21 November 2013]

Another interviewee, from a pro-Roma subcontracting NGO, argued that the effects of these camps on the Roma integration depend on how these spaces are managed, and hence highlighted the importance of camp management in the empowerment of the Roma:

Even though we work in the camps, our association is different from the others because we have a different approach to the schooling services and we aim to foster the empowerment and autonomy of Roma families, something that other associations don't do. [Interview, 6 December 2013]

These interviews show that working in a Roma camp has led certain pro-Roma NGOs to attenuate their demand for Roma housing inclusion and to approve the short-term practical effects of the camps instead of condemning their potential long-term consequences. Moreover, they tend to focus on how these spaces should be managed rather than on more inclusive alternatives – shown, for instance, by a group of architects that developed a participatory project with the Roma living in an informal settlement, building a two-story house at the same cost of a Portakabin (Muzzonigro, 2011).

In addition to this, the incorporation of pro-Roma associations into institutional governance has reduced the socio-organizational resources that could enable alliances between pro-Roma actors. For example, pro-Roma associations that do not work in camps denounce the co-option of subcontractors and their acceptance of this form of racial discrimination. Similarly, Roma associations are critical of non-Roma associations working in camps, accused of profiting from Roma segregation. As a result, non-Roma subcontractors are rarely involved in campaigns with Roma associations and other pro-Roma groups. This difference became more marked in times of economic crisis, when subcontracting NGOs mobilize to secure their access to shrinking public funding. For instance, in October 2013, the Alliance of the Cooperatives, an organization that brings together the subcontractors working in the Roma camps, organized a rally to protest public spending cuts. This demonstration was not attended by members of pro-Roma advocacy groups that do not work in Roma camps and some of them even explicitly criticized this protest. That's what a member of a Roma association said about the above demonstration:

It's evident that these bunch of non-Roma workers were fighting for their own rights, and they did not give a damn about the Roma community that just becomes a sack of potatoes that everyone can use for their own political and economic interests! [Interview, 18 November 2013]

The incorporation of pro-Roma NGOs has, therefore, affected the frames and resource mobilization processes of pro-Roma actors that, instead of strongly advocating the Roma housing rights as they did in the 1990s, now silently accept the Roma segregation in institutional camps.

The inclusion of pro-Roma NGOs in the management of the Roma camps also increased the financial resources of pro-Roma associations that work as subcontractors and, consequently, their dependence on the local and national government, especially in a period of economic recession and austerity, as just illustrated. Furthermore, the difficulty in navigating the intricate bureaucracy about budget decisions and funding allocation in Rome (Berenice, Compare, Lunaria, & OssevAzione, 2013) facilitates the obfuscation around the financial benefits of ‘helping’ the Roma. This situation was exacerbated with the issuing of the Nomad Emergency Decree in 2008 (Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri, 2008), through which the government declared a state of emergency with regard to Roma camps allegedly threatening public health and security. This decree was made possible by a national law adopted in 2001 (Law 401/2001) that extended emergency power legislations beyond natural disasters, including ‘major events’ (like the organization of the G8 in L'Aquila and the swimming World Cup, both held in Rome in 2009). These extra powers involved additional public funding and accelerated subcontractor selection procedures through direct nominations rather than public tenders. As a result, the public outlays on Roma camps almost doubled in 2009 after the declaration of the Nomad Emergency in 2008, during which the municipality of Rome received 32 million Euros (Stasolla, 2012).



This funding was used for new exceptional measures (such as the increased police surveillance of the Roma camps), while the ordinary public expenditure accounted for another 30 million Euros (Stasolla, 2012). Moreover, most of this money went to maintenance and security services providers, while the funding for activities to promote Roma integration only came to 0.4 per cent of the total amount (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2014). As a result, this situation favored a specialization of pro-Roma associations in the management of camps rather than in integration activities, increasing the distance between their initial goal of Roma housing inclusion and their actual work in the Roma camps.

Being a pro-Roma NGO while actively contributing to Roma segregation does not openly threaten their “frame consistency” – defined as the “congruency between an SMO’s [social movement organization] articulated beliefs, claims, and actions” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 619). Indeed, the ambiguity of the Roma camps gave them an opportunity to deploy a wide array of justifications to reconcile their apparently contradictory position. For example, some associations acknowledge the ethnic difference of the Roma minority (supposedly nomadic) and claim to help them to integrate. While explaining the rationale of their work, an interviewee working for a subcontracting NGO said:

They're really ignoramus when they arrive here, so that's why we work towards civic education, that's the first thing ... I mean, we help them! [Interview, 21 September 2013]

Others reject the stereotypical idea of nomadic Roma and argue that the Roma camp is a space of disempowerment. In these cases, these associations frame their action within the humanitarian character of the Roma camps, aimed at the integration of the Roma. In an interview with another member of a subcontracting Roma association, it emerged that a critique of the current state of the Roma camps does not necessarily go against working for them, because these spaces can foster the Roma inclusion too:

[W]e try to bring our work in the camp but we also try to take the people outside the camp [ ...]. For example, when a lady needs to go to the doctor, other associations would go with her and take her wherever she needs. But we don't do that: we take her the first time, but then she has to learn to go by herself because we want to emancipate the Roma community. [Interview, 18 November 2013]

The ambiguity of the Roma camps facilitated, while at the same time being intensified by, the incorporation of the NGOs through a change in their framing strategies and resources. This shows how the hybridity of camp sovereignty is based on ever-evolving arrangements characterized in different times by conflict, negotiation, co-optation and collaboration.<sup>4</sup>

## 5.2. New opportunities for Roma advocacy: urban squatting in times of crisis

However, pro-Roma non-governmental actors also react against these constraints to the Roma housing inclusion and strategically mobilize resources and solidarities. The economic crisis, the

incorporation of pro-Roma NGOs and the ambiguity of the camps have resulted in a weakening of coalitions for Roma housing rights. But, more recently, they have also worked as opportunities for new alliances, strategies, and claims (see Maestri, 2014). For example, in the last few years, the city of Rome has witnessed an increasing number of political squats involving Roma groups. This is the case of the squat Metropolit in the eastern periphery of Rome that, in 2009, was joined by approximately 50 Roma families. After their eviction from an informal settlement, the municipality of Rome offered to relocate them to an institutional Roma camp. However, almost half of the evicted Roma refused this relocation option and moved to Metropolit (a squat set up by the BPM squatting movement), where still more than 20 Roma families live today. As a result, they have been included in the negotiation between the BPM movement and the municipality of Rome, which agreed that in case of eviction squatters (i.e. Roma squatters included) should be entitled to council housing. Becoming ‘squatters’ within a movement and hence escaping the ambiguous definition of the camp target population, allowed the Roma not to be confined in Roma camps (Maestri, 2016). The squatting movement already supported Roma groups in the past (see Mudu, 2004; Vitale & Boschetti, 2011) but, in the recent cases in the Italian capital city, this solidarity was framed within the broader transnational and urban mobilizations emerged after the 2007–2008 financial crisis, such as the Occupy movement (Maestri, 2014; Themelis, 2016). The alliance between pro-Roma advocacy groups and the squatting movement intensified in the context of this wave of contention, during which the economic crisis worked as an opportunity for developing a new solidarity between Roma and squatters. It was also exploited to generate a new framing process – i.e. the Roma as victims of the economic and housing crisis and no longer as a discriminated ethnic minority (see Maestri, 2014, 2016). Indeed, pro-Roma advocacy groups – both at a national and international level, for instance the ERRC – tend to operate within a human right framework (Maestri, 2017c). In contrast, as pointed out by an interviewee working for an association supporting the Roma in Metropolit:

We need to talk about housing in general [and not about the housing of the Roma only]. There is a huge housing problem in our city and in our country, and we shouldn't splinter the struggle for housing, we can't allow this to happen [ ...]. This is a general problem that includes the Roma too. [Interview, 22 October 2013]

Moreover, this alliance led to a new repertoire of action, i.e. “political squatting” (Pruijt, 2013). Metropolit situates itself between “deprivation based squatting” and “political squatting”, whereby the former is a way for “providing housing for the needy”, while the latter does not present squatting as a goal but as a tool to criticize the state (Pruijt, 2013, pp. 52–53). Although Roma migrants have often resorted to squatting as a housing strategy (by, for instance, setting up informal settlements), “political squatting” was not part of their repertoire of action, which consisted more of well-established and contained forms of contention such as demonstrations and protests, for example the one held on 8 June 2008 in Rome (see Aradau, Huysmans, Maciotti, & Squire, 2010) or the one organized in Bologna on 16 May 2015 (see Maestri, 2017b). Further to using the economic crisis and the Roma camp ambiguity as opportunities, the Roma who joined political squats have used the city as a space of politicization (Miller & Nicholls, 2013), allying themselves with the urban social movements. Through these new opportunities, frames, resources and repertoires, the urban squatting movement and the Roma managed to influence the deployment of the camp as a technology to govern Roma slum dwellers.

These examples show how the positioning of the actors involved

<sup>4</sup> In certain cases, the co-optation of actors also turned into corruption. In 2014, the police enquiry *Mafia Capitale* (i.e. Capital Mafia) uncovered a corrupt system of management of the Roma camps, including local political administrators, individuals from criminal organizations, as well as members of major subcontractors. These latter rigged the bids for outsourcing services in the camps in exchange of bribery.

in the Roma camp governance has changed in the last three decades. In order to understand how the Roma camps are governed, we need not only to understand how the political authority over these camps is fragmented between a plurality of both state and non-state actors, but also how it is the product of contention. The creation of the Roma camps in the 1990s, though seemingly produced as a decision of the executive powers in a situation of emergency, is in fact the outcome of compromise and negotiation among conflicting parties advancing very different claims and changing their positions over time. Indeed, the protracted presence of these camps is not the product of a prolonged state of exception decided by the state but the result of changed opportunities, frames and resources mobilized by the actors involved in the governance of these spaces. Likewise, the recent strategies of action which are redrawing the use of the camp emerged within a reconfiguration of repertoires, frames and resources enabled by new opportunity windows.

## 6. Conclusion

Even though the creation of institutional camps in times of emergency is the result of government resolutions, there are a plethora of non-state actors that participate in the camp governance. While Agamben-inspired research on the camp stresses the role of the executive authority in the formation of this space of exception, scholars drawing on the Foucauldian notion of governmentality foreground the plurality of governing practices and actors shaping the camp. Also the critics of an Agambenian approach argue that the sovereignty over the camp, far from being an indivisible entity, is layered (Turner, 2005), multiple (Hanafi & Long, 2010) and hybrid (Ramadan & Fregonese, 2017). With this article, I have contributed to this debate and shown that camp sovereignty is not only multiple and heterogeneous but also inherently contentious, i.e. constituted by conflicting and changeable interactions. To consider how hybrid sovereign assemblages evolve can allow us to comprehend how camps persist or change over time. In order to examine the interactions and conflicts between these actors, I have suggested to turn to the analytical tools developed by McAdam et al. (2001) in their theory on dynamics of contention. This is indeed useful to unpick the elements characterizing the conflicting relationships around the Roma camp, namely the framing strategies developed by actors, the opportunities they use, the resources they mobilize and the repertoires they adopt.

Through this theoretical framework, I have analyzed the governance of the Roma camps in Rome and I suggest that a similar analysis could be fruitful to understand the sovereignty of other institutional, or “necessity” (see Hailey, 2009), camps. I have illustrated how considering all the elements of contentious politics allows us to trace the historical development of the power relations between state and non-state actors, as well as their fluctuation between conflict, negotiation, compromise, and co-optation. Indeed, while in the early 1990s non-state actors managed to influence the government decision to create the Roma camps, the later incorporation into institutional governance of several pro-Roma associations produced a change in their framing discourses as well as socio-organizational and financial resources, which resulted in a weakening of their demands and in the persistence of the Roma segregation in camps. However, a recent shift in repertoires of action in the urban context, and the opportunities unexpectedly offered by the recent economic crisis, enabled the social movements to strengthen their claims to Roma housing inclusion through new frames, resources and repertoires.

To conclude, this paper has addressed the question of camp sovereignty by conceptually foregrounding the conflict between a

multiplicity of actors and their changeable positions. Brown (2010) has highlighted the ambiguity and paradoxes of the notion of sovereignty in Western political philosophy and argued that sovereignty is “both generated and generative, yet it is also ontologically a priori, presupposed, original” (Brown, 2010, p.54). In order to embrace and fully grasp the contradictory nature of sovereignty, we should not only focus on what makes it multiple, as opposed to unitary and autonomous, but also on what makes it inconsistent and fluctuating, as opposed to fixed and temporally absolute.

## Conflict of interest

None.

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