

Struggles and ambiguities over political subjectivities in the camp: Roma camp dwellers between neoliberal and urban citizenship in Italy

Gaja Maestri

Abstract

What is the political subjectivity of the Roma living in Italian camps? Although the camp prevents the Roma from enjoying a series of rights, it does not fully determine their citizenship status. Indeed, citizenship is always contested and evolving through the interaction of a plurality of actors. By understanding the camp as an “assemblage space”, this article aims to unpack the complex political subjectivities of Roma camps-dwellers and to reflect on the struggles and ambiguities characterising the citizenship-making process in camp spaces. Through in-depth interviews conducted with members of non-governmental organisations and social movements in the city of Rome, I investigate the contention over meanings produced around the space of the camp and the Roma political subjectivities. I finally identify and discuss two framing strategies constituting the Roma as right bearers and supporting their demand to housing inclusion: a neoliberal and a “right to the city” discourse that generate entrepreneurial and urban subjects.

Keywords: camp; assemblage; political subjectivity; neoliberal citizenship; right to the city; Roma people

Struggles and ambiguities over political subjectivities in the camp: Roma camp dwellers between neoliberal and urban citizenship in Italy

Introduction

When discussing the state of the Roma citizenship in Italy, one of the first images usually evoked is that of the camp, demarcated by high fences, often close to dumping areas, and inhabited by people living in old caravans, in poverty and dirt. Several thousand Roma live in such camps in Italy today. They were created in the early 1990s by local municipalities as emergency shelters but have often persisted beyond their initially planned temporariness. In these spaces, there is no difference between nationals and European citizens, undocumented migrants or stateless people. If a Roma lives in a camp, a series of rights are suspended regardless of his or her legal citizenship. However, the utter exclusion experienced in the camp does not provide an exhaustive picture of the citizenship of Roma camp-dwellers. Indeed, citizenship is more than a formal line between inclusion and exclusion: it is always contested and evolving through the interaction and struggles of a plurality of actors, who have very different ideas of what being political means. This article therefore aims to contribute to an understanding of the complex political subjectivities emerging in Roma camps and, more generally, to offer some reflections on the process of political subjectivation in camp spaces.

Two main conceptualisations have guided the analysis of Roma camp political subjectivities. On the one hand, according to an Agambenian understanding of the camp as space of exceptionality, Roma are considered to be “bare life”. On the other, an approach to the camp as a political space has allowed scholars to stress the political agency of camp-dwellers. However, I argue that to view the camp as an “assemblage space” can also fruitfully contribute to expand our comprehension of the current ways of being political in the Roma camps, which are underpinned by a plethora of discourses and framing strategies developed by an assemblage of non-governmental actors surrounding this space. By drawing on 20 in-depth interviews with members of non-governmental organisations and social movements, centred on the different meanings they produced around the space of the Roma camps, I will discuss two incipient ways of being political and claim-making

strategies: a neoliberal discourse, which constructs the Roma as entrepreneurial subjects, and an urban political subjectivity, linked to the “right to the city”, which presents the Roma as fully integrated in the urban fabric. While both articulations are proposed as empowering the Roma, I will consider how they can either reproduce inequality or enable “acts of citizenship”, through which the Roma can challenge exclusionary logics. Through these two examples, I not only aim to show the complexity of the political subjectivities in the Italian Roma camps, but also to underscore the struggles and ambiguities at the core of citizenship-making processes in camp spaces.

Citizenship in the Roma camps: from exceptional to political spaces

The Roma people are one of the most discriminated ethnic minorities in Europe. Amongst European countries, Italy is where Roma households are most at risk of poverty and where a large slice of the Roma population faces discrimination in housing. It is estimated that 38 per cent of Roma experience housing segregation in Europe, and that 10 per cent live in informal settlements (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2012). In Italy, approximately 40,000 Roma, i.e. almost one-third of the entire Roma population, experience severe housing deprivation, living in informal settlements and official camps run by Italian municipalities (Dalla Zuanna 2013). Although institutional camps for the Roma have been used since the 1990s as temporary emergency shelters for Roma evicted from informal settlements (many of whom arrived as asylum seekers during the Yugoslav Wars [Sigona 2015]), they have persisted for years and today strongly mark the geographies of exclusion of the Roma groups in Italy. Roma living there experience residential segregation, isolation, and territorial stigma, in addition to poor hygiene and safety conditions that often characterise these overcrowded camps (for example, some camps host more than one thousand people). For this reason, at the beginning of the new millennium, Italy became infamously known as ‘Campland’, the country of camps ‘aimed at depriving Roma of full participation in, or even contact or interaction with, Italian life’ (European Roma Rights Center 2000, 17).

Within Italy, Rome is the city where this situation is most alarming. Approximately seven thousand Roma live in 18 institutional camps run by the municipality of Rome (Figure 1). These camps are equipped with small Portakabins or caravans, basic facilities (such as drinking water, toilets and electricity) and with a series of additional services provided by subcontracting NGOs, ranging from internal surveillance and security to so-called “socio-educational” activities for the residents, i.e. mainly student transport and homework support for the children. The number of Roma living there

has increased throughout the last twenty years as the conditions of these camps have continuously worsened, negatively impacting on the health and safety of the Roma population. New camps have mushroomed in the urban fringe and in non-residential and isolated areas, far from public services and facilities, exacerbating the isolation of this already stigmatised ethnic minority. In these camps, the Roma are racially segregated, kept separate from the rest of society, surveilled, and bound to a permanent state of temporariness, awaiting relocation, which, however, has not been accomplished thus far.

INSERT HERE

Figure 1: The Roma official camp in Salone street, Rome. Reprinted with permission of Associazione 21 Luglio.

Although these camps are mainly comprised of third-country nationals and stateless people (especially from former Yugoslavia), official figures show that approximately one-third of the camp population is composed by Italian and European Roma citizens (mostly Romanian). However, as mentioned in the introduction, the Roma are marginalised regardless of their formal citizenship. In the Roma camps, the nationality of a camp-resident does not make much difference to the difficulties he or she encounters in the everyday life, labour and housing market, and access to health. For example, Roberto, a Roma interviewee working for a Roma association, said:

The Italian government should ask itself “why did we confine some Italian citizens in a camp?”. But nobody asks this question because, they say, “they’re not Italians, they’re Roma.” (Interview held in Rome on 18 November 2013)

As Çağlar and Mehling (2013, 156) argue when describing the condition of the Roma in the European space, this ethnic minority can be viewed as ‘in but not of it’: even though the Roma who live in camps find themselves in the Italian territory – and are, in some case, even Italian citizens – they are de facto not seen as part of the Italian political community. For this reason, a number of scholars have interpreted these camps as spaces of exception, where the Roma are stripped of their rights and perpetually ostracised. For instance, Piasere (2006) was one of the first to define the Italian Roma camps as apparatuses of inclusion through exclusion (often justified by humanitarian purposes), where the Roma are denied citizenship and reduced to what he termed in Italian ‘*campodini*’, i.e. subjects of the camp.

The analysis of the political condition of the Roma camp-dwellers has drawn on theories developed in camp studies. By employing different understandings of the space of the camp, scholars have tried and understand the different articulations of subjectivities emerging there. Piasere (2006) used the work of the Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998), who defines the camp as the spatialisation of a state of exception and whose work has been largely used in studying different types of camp (see Giaccaria and Minca 2011, Minca 2015). The state of exception produces a state of “bare life” whereby the “homo sacer” is excised from the realm of citizenship and subject to violence with impunity. The Agambenian reading of the Roma camps has been used by other scholars too. For example, Clough Marinaro (2009) analyses the Roma camps through the notion of exception, as relegated spaces that perpetuate the seclusion of this stigmatised ethnic minority through the suspension of the ordinary law. Moreover, Alunni (2012, 8) argues that ‘Agamben’s theories seem to fit particularly well in the field of studies on the situation of Roma in Europe, particularly in Italy’. Agamben-inspired theories on camp spaces stress their exceptionality and emphasise how the subjects who find themselves there are reduced to “bare life”, excluded from the political domain and potentially exposed to full force of sovereign power.

While this view accentuates the exceptional and disempowering dimensions of the camps, producing bare life, other scholars have underscored the agency of the camp-dwellers and their capacity to shape their political subjectivity. In this case, the camp is not ultimately determined by exceptionality but shaped by the myriad of interactions between camp-dwellers that live and co-create that space (Rygiel 2011). Although camps are engineered to cancel one's citizenship status and to hinder a formal process of claim-making (Isin and Rygiel 2007), citizenship can be nonetheless enacted by subjects who, by claiming their right to have rights, constitute new scripts of political subjectivities (Isin and Nielsen 2008). Thus, the camp is here thought “from below” (Redclift 2013, 309) not as an exceptional space, but as a ‘political space’ (Redclift 2013; see Rygiel 2012, Sigona 2015), where the Roma can constitute themselves as political subjects. For instance, in order to counterbalance the view of the camp as merely segregating and exclusionary, Sigona (2015) has coined the term ‘campzenship’ to highlight the specific mode of being political that emerges in the everyday life of the camps, as opposed to the depoliticised Agambenian concept of “bare life”. According to Sigona (2015), the camps is not only a disempowering political technology, but also a space for strategies of protection, recognition and anonymity. Both Sigona (2016) and Puggioni (2014) argue that “bare life” does not accurately capture the entanglement of life and politics in the

camps, as the residents negotiate their position with the state often in imperceptible ways. To conceive the camp as a political space, where resistance and agency are still possible, allows us to expand our understanding of the political subjectivities of the Roma camp-dwellers, including those emerging from their actions. For example, Aradau, Huysmans, Macioti and Squire (2013) observe how, during a demonstration held in Rome in 2008, the Roma living in camps constituted themselves as European citizens by claiming their right to free movement.

So far, scholars have shown that in the Roma camps the Roma are characterised by multiple shades of being political. Following an Agambenian perspective, the Roma camp-dwellers are defined as bare life, excluded from the political realm. In contrast, by criticising this perspective, other scholars have underscored the agency of the Roma and their capacity to claim their inclusion and citizenship. In addition to this, in the next section I will introduce a further understanding of the camp as an assemblage space which, however, has not yet been used to explore other ways in which the subject position of the Roma camp-dwellers is articulated.

The camp as an assemblage space: what political subjectivities?

The Agambenian reading of the camp as a device that places the Roma outside the realm of citizenship is not only limited because it overlooks the possibility of resistance of the so-called “homo sacer” (see Butler and Spivak 2007, Gregory 2006), as discussed earlier. While the proponents of the camp as a political space aim to underscore the agency of the Roma camp-dwellers, other scholars argue that, by equating the political with the legal sphere, Agamben’s account also overlooks the complexity of sovereign agencies that produce this space (see Gregory 2006, Martin 2015, Ramadan 2013). Brown (2010) indeed maintains that Agamben conceives sovereignty as supreme and unaccountable, endorsing a unitary and monolithic understanding of a sovereign subject. In contrast, the camp is co-produced ‘by a plethora of institutions and organizations’ and ‘multiple partially sovereign actors’ (Ramadan 2013, 69), as well as by ‘the people acting on, inhabiting or surrounding it’ (Martin 2015, 14), including organisations acting in solidarity with the camp residents.

In order to include these aspects, Ramadan (2013) suggests approaching the space of the camp through the lens of assemblage, which can better account for the relations between multiple actors constituting it (and including material aspects), from sovereign actors to the people living in it.

Similarly, some scholars have drawn attention to the non-governmental organisations participating in the governing and contestation of the Italian Roma camps: from subcontracting associations involved in the management of the camps and in services for the youth or job placement, to pro-Roma advocacy groups that criticise the Roma camps and try to lobby the local government for more inclusive housing solutions (see Armillei 2015; Clough Marinaro and Daniele 2014; Daniele 2011). While these works have mainly looked at how non-governmental organisations are implicated in the reproduction of Roma exclusion, by underscoring the multiplicity of non-governmental agencies and actors operating within and around the camp, I argue that to view the camp as an assemblage (Ramadan 2013) can also fruitfully contribute to advance the understanding of new political subjectivities emerging in this space.

The Agambenian understanding of the camp is implicitly underpinned by a Marshallian approach to citizenship (Marshall 2009), conceived as set of legal obligations and entitlements. According to this conception, those who are not legally members of a political community are not considered citizens and, therefore, the only way they can achieve citizenship is by becoming formally bestowed with the formal membership to a polity. As a result, the camp, by denying this membership for either security or humanitarian reasons (Minca 2015), relegates the camp-dwellers to an exceptional state of non-citizenship. However, this view does not include the strategies through which disenfranchised subjects can demand their rights. For this reason, Isin (2002) has expanded the definition of citizenship, defined as a way of “being political” that is established through acts and practices and not only through formal definitions, and that is dynamic and constantly open to new reformulations (Isin and Nielsen 2008). As discussed earlier, to understand the camp as a political space highlights how those who are deemed non-citizens can still claim their inclusion. This view allows us to understand how Roma camp-dwellers are not passively excised from the political community but are political actors that can actively influence and determine their political subjectivities. Indeed, marginalised subjects can still enact their rights through “acts of citizenship” (Isin and Nielsen 2008). This notion emphasises the rupture of a given order and the opening up of moments of potentiality in which subjects challenge inequalities and re-define their marginal position, by constituting themselves as claimants.

To see the camp as an assemblage contributes to an understanding of the various ways of “being political” in two main ways. Firstly, it widens our understanding of citizenship, without reducing it

to the Schmittian binary opposition between friend and enemy. Indeed, since the space of the camp is constituted by a plurality of non-governmental actors, there are competing articulations of political subjectivities. These, however, are hardly reducible to either citizens or non-citizens but encompass different subject positions of citizens, strangers, outsiders and aliens (Isin, 2002). Secondly, to focus on the heterogeneous group of actors, which either constitute or challenge the camp, underscores the multiple strategies at play in the articulation of political subjectivities, from exclusion to solidarity. Acts of citizenship can, for example, be supported through acts of solidarity developed by actors who are not subject to the same marginalisation of the Roma, but who, nevertheless, can challenge the dividing principle of exclusionary politics and allow new political subjectivities to be claimed (Squire 2009). Similarly, strategies enacted by other actors can foreclose the claim-making of the Roma and reproduce exclusionary processes.

The remainder of the article aims to illustrate these two points. I will show how emerging discourses and practices of non-governmental actors surrounding the Roma camp are shaping new articulations of Roma political subjectivities. In doing so, I will consider the ambiguities and potentialities of these framing strategies, as they can either reproduce the marginalisation of the Roma or forge solidarities buttressing acts of citizenship.

The Roma camp assemblage in Rome

The Roma camps are governed and shaped by a plurality of non-governmental actors, such as, voluntary-based non-profit organisations, Roma associations, faith-based charities, pro-Roma advocacy groups, national and international NGOs, subcontracting cooperatives, and also social movements. Non-profit organisations played a crucial role in the creation of the Roma camps in the 1980s and 1990s (Sigona 2011) and some of them are still deeply involved in the management of the Roma camps today (see Daniele 2011) – from security and maintenance to social services. While most of these organisations present themselves as pro-Roma, they engage in very different activities and have very different opinions about the Roma camps and the Roma inclusion. For example, social movements and advocacy groups are explicitly against the Roma camps and therefore refuse to collaborate with the local government as this would, in their opinion, contribute to the perpetuation of the Roma camps. In contrast with this view, other NGOs and faith-based charities assume a more pragmatic attitude and, while acknowledging the limitations of the Roma camps, accept their short-term function of poverty alleviation. For this reason, certain cooperatives work as subcontractors

for the City of Rome and provide social services to the camp-dwellers, while other non-profit organisations even work as managers of the Roma camps. However, in 2014 the police enquiry *Mafia Capitale* (i.e. Capital Mafia) uncovered the corrupt management of the Roma camps, which included local political administrators, individuals from criminal organisations, as well as members of major subcontracting cooperatives working in the Roma camps. These latter rigged and won the bids for outsourcing services in the camps in exchange of bribery involving cash and other kinds of favours (like securing jobs for family members). As a result, this police enquiry undermined the credibility of these subcontracting associations and cast a shadow over their alleged pro-Roma activities.

The research on the role of NGOs and the Italian Roma camps has so far focused on two main aspects. Firstly, on the incorporation of non-profit associations which, instead of empowering the Roma, end up silencing their voice and strengthening their segregation (Armillei 2015; Clough Marinaro and Daniele 2014; Daniele 2011; Sigona 2005). Secondly, scholars have investigated the humanitarianism discourse employed by pro-Roma NGOs which reproduces the Roma as depoliticised and weak (Clough Marinaro and Daniele 2011; Sigona 2015). For these reasons, the role of NGOs in criticising the exclusion of the Roma has been often seen of secondary importance, as these groups have been accused of confining the Roma to a subaltern position within a human rights framework, rather than empowering them (Trehan 2009). Nevertheless, as I will show in the following pages, I contend that there is more to this and that non-governmental actors who claim to support the Roma inclusion deploy a series of different discourses that define new Roma political subjectivities. Understanding the camp as an assemblage of different actors can offer a more nuanced understanding of the variety of political subjectivities articulated through the action of non-governmental organisations, which can either foreclose or enable acts of citizenship. Indeed, as argued by Atger (2013, 191) in her analysis of Roma expulsions in France in 2010, 'the right to claim rights is not necessarily enacted only by those whose rights are denied, but also by those who can declare solidarity with them'.

The following section draws on fieldwork conducted in the Italian capital city of Rome between September and December 2013, during which I collected 20 in-depth interviews with members of a variety of associations involved, more or less officially, in the Roma camps, including both Roma and non-Roma subcontracting cooperatives, faith-based charities, advocacy groups and social

movements. Despite, as mentioned earlier, these associations having different roles in the Roma camps, they all present themselves as pro-Roma and, therefore, see the current Roma segregation in camps as a problem. The interviews mainly focused on how association members and activists construe the space of the Roma camp and its exclusionary logic, and on the discourses and strategies that their groups develop to end the segregation in the Roma in camps. As argued by Feldman (2014, 246) with regard to the refugee camps, 'asking "what is a camp?" is strictly linked to the question of "what is to be a refugee?"'. Likewise, in my research, by asking "what is a Roma camp?", I aimed to unravel the types of political subjectivities forged there.

Some of the interviewees confirmed what has been already observed in the literature, for example the diffusion of a humanitarianism discourse that challenges the Roma confinement in camps on the base of human rights, while at the same time also risking portraying the Roma as unable to represent and provide for themselves. However, other interviewees went beyond a human rights framework and developed alternative ways in which the Roma are articulated as political beings, i.e. bearers of certain rights. In the first case, the discourse and strategies adopted by non-governmental organisations construct the Roma as neoliberal citizens, while in the second case associations and social movements articulate a form of urban citizenship. In contrast with a human rights framework that invokes respect for the rights of the Roma as a discriminated ethnic minority group, the neoliberal and urban ways of being political focus on the Roma's socio-economic conditions and frame them as entrepreneurial subjects who demand their right to work and to achieve economic independence, in the first case, and as subjects that assert their presence and participation in the urban fabric, therefore claiming their right to the city and housing, in the second.

'The main problem is the lack of jobs': the Roma as neoliberal subjects

While NGOs employing a human rights framework perceive the Roma camps to be the product of a racial discrimination that prevents an ethnic minority from accessing basic rights, other associations conceive the segregation in camps as primarily the effect of socio-economic mechanisms that marginalise the Roma. In their opinion, the Roma camp is considered as the spatial translation of two main exclusionary dynamics: firstly, the discrimination of the Roma in the labour market, due to the legacy of their long-term high rate of unemployment, which undermines their right to work; secondly, of the patronising attitudes of policymakers and charities, which disempower them instead of fostering their autonomy.

Andrea is a member of a cooperative that works as a subcontractor for the municipality of Rome, providing job placement and schooling services in some of the Roma camps in Rome. During the interview, I asked him what he thought about the Roma camps. This is what he said:

In the best of all possible worlds camps shouldn't exist. But the main problem is the lack of jobs. We could say "let's close down all the camps and let's give the Roma a real house" but, then, would they afford to keep a house? Today there is an incredibly high rate of unemployment and inability to work among Roma communities. But not because they lack work ability or because they don't want to find a job. It is a consequence of a twenty-year period during which the Roma have been cut out from the job market.

(Interview held in Rome on 21 November 2013)

When talking about the Roma camps, Andrea contends that this form of segregation is not the cause of Roma exclusion but a consequence of their discrimination in the labour market sector, which determines their long-lasting poverty and consequent impossibility to move out from the camp. In his opinion, even if the space of the camp did not exist, with the current level of unemployment (approximately 70 per cent of Roma in Italy are or have been unemployed in the last five years [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2012]), most of the Roma would not have the financial means to afford a house. Addressing Roma unemployment is, for Andrea's cooperative, the best way to put an end to the Roma camps in the long term. Therefore, his association specialises in a series of services to promote job training and placement for adult camp residents, as well as the schooling of Roma children. By increasing employment and education levels among the Roma communities, Andrea's association aims to increase the economic independence of Roma families, who will then be able to move out from the camps and find a house in the private housing market.

Andrea's opinion points to the lack of economic autonomy of the Roma people, that leads them to rely on publicly-funded Roma camps, where they are offered a shelter almost for free (camp residents usually only pay utility bills) but where they are isolated and stigmatised. There are also other aspects that contribute to the disempowerment of the Roma, who subsequently struggle to move out from the camp. Gregorio, a member of another subcontracting association, argues that the social services provided in the camps, instead of empowering the Roma, often result in an increased dependence. Associazione 21 Luglio (2014) estimated that in 2013 approximately 80 per cent of the public outlays went into the management and surveillance of the camp, 20 per cent went

into schooling services, while only 0.2 per cent was earmarked for social inclusion services that aim to support the Roma to move out from the camps. The use of public funding reveals that the policymakers prioritise the management of the Roma camps rather than the social inclusion of camp residents. Moreover, the schooling services provided by subcontracting associations do not contribute to social inclusion but exacerbate the Roma dependence on social workers who replace the parents in the management of relationships with the school. In addition to leading to weaker family involvement in children's education, the Roma parents reduce their contact with the rest of society and isolate themselves even more in the camp, igniting a vicious circle of marginalisation. However, social inclusion services that promote the autonomy of the Roma are crucial in guiding them towards a life outside the Roma camps. In Gregorio's opinion:

Associations should do what we're already trying to do, that is, fostering the autonomy of the families, putting them directly in contact with the schools. If associations keep acting as intermediaries between them and the rest of society, it's obvious that segregation will persist because the chances of encounters are reduced, and this will feed into the vicious circle of camp isolation. (Interview held in Rome on 6 December 2013)

In this view, the camp is a space that is sustained by a mechanism of disempowerment nourished by associations that claim to be helping the Roma, but that in fact weaken their autonomy. To overcome the material barriers of the camps, pro-Roma associations should support the empowerment of the Roma. For this reason, Gregorio's association decided to stop providing services that they do not contribute to the empowerment of the Roma, as in the aforementioned case of school services.

These interviews highlight two main obstacles to the housing inclusion of the Roma, namely a lack of economic independence and autonomy. In Andrea's and Gregorio's opinion the exclusionary logics underpinning the Roma camps can be found in the wrong belief that the Roma are unfit for work (because considered either lazy or untrustworthy), and in the equally unfounded assumption that they cannot look after themselves. These associations, by denouncing and addressing these marginalising dynamics, frame their claims within a neoliberal discourse and, thus, articulate the Roma as neoliberal subjects. They, indeed, argue that the Roma should be enabled to autonomously move out from the camp by gaining economic resources through work and by no longer being patronised by social workers. Through these framing strategies these associations negotiate an

entrepreneurial form of political subjectivity and identify a series of rights that construct the Roma as neoliberal citizens.

Neoliberalism can be defined as a political ideology that postulates the existence of a subject characterised by individual entrepreneurship and autonomy that reach full expression in the market (Harvey 2005). The model of citizenship promoted by the neoliberal discourse surpasses the traditional national citizenship and centres upon a marketisation and contractualisation of the relationship between subjects and the state, whereby the entitlement to rights is conditional and can be earned after proving one's activation and responsibility (van Baar 2012; Suvarierol and Kirk 2014). In the first example, Andrea's association promotes the demand for more effective job placement projects on the basis of the right to fulfil the Roma economic independence. Similarly, Gregorio's organisation aims to support the Roma by making them more independent and in charge of their children's schooling, hence helping them in their demand to be treated as responsible subjects. The neoliberal discourse allows to overcome the articulation of the Roma as racial other, as well as a humanitarianism framework that depicts the Roma as passive and weak subjects needing help from the "host" society. Indeed, it rejects any intrinsic difference of the Roma, by ascribing their persistent segregation to a historical exclusion from the labour market, and it also refutes their purported laziness by promoting their empowerment and autonomy. In this sense, it could potentially support the end of this form of segregation.

However, the associations that refer to a neoliberal discourse do not appear to effectively challenge the current exclusionary processes that marginalise the Roma. First, it risks reinforcing ethnic inequalities by normalising the stereotype of "Roma laziness" (Marušák and Singer 2009). Indeed, while often not explicitly defined as "laziness", policymakers and scholars have raised concern about the possible welfare dependency of the Roma, which has become a widely-agreed explanation for Roma poverty – as, for example, both the interviewees Andrea and Gregorio have argued. For instance, as shown by van Baar (2012), this discourse underpins the implementation of activation policies, aimed at improving the socio-economic mobility of unemployed Roma. These measures have, however, serious dehumanising effects on the most marginalised members of the Roma minority, who are depicted as 'useless, inadaptable, permanently "inactive" and socio-economically "immobile"' (van Baar 2012, 1297). In addition to this, the development of programmes of community-empowerment can strengthen the idea that camp-dwellers are "vulnerable" or, in

other words, the not ready subjects of neoliberal government' (Voiculescu 2017, 23). Secondly, neoliberalism is framing an increasingly dominant model of citizenship, often used as a form of political subjection and ethnic governmentality through which the Roma are rendered governable (van Baar 2012; see also Suvarierol and Kirk 2014). For example, fostering the community of camp-dwellers has been regarded as a form of neoliberal governmentality, which can help justify the ineffective role of the formal government by giving new emphasis to the individual and the community responsibility (Bulley 2014; Feldman 2014). Indeed, in the case of the Roma camps, Daniele (2011) and Clough Marinaro and Daniele (2014) have shown that participation can be used as a tool to govern and to incorporate Roma leaders in order to maintain the status-quo (see also Anghel 2015).

'if I keep you in prison for a lifetime, you'll get used to it': the Roma and the right to the city

Instead of seeing the persistent Roma camps as the outcome of a lack of economic independence, the of non-governmental organisations introduced in this section see these spaces as the very root cause of the enduring marginalisation experienced by the Roma people. From this perspective, for example, Roma unemployment is not considered to be the cause of the persistence of the camps but its consequence. As many Roma argue, to find a job is indeed harder if one admits to living in a Roma camp and, for this reason, many often lie about their place of residence. Likewise, their lack of autonomy in everyday life, including not being involved in the schooling of their children, is a result of the exacerbated isolation of the Roma in camps and not vice-versa. In order to address these problems, a series of associations demand the dismantlement of the Roma camps as the first and fundamental step for enabling a citizenship-making process.

Francesco is a member of a pro-Roma advocacy group in Rome. When I asked him what was the most important cause of the segregation of the Roma, he replied:

The priority is to close down the camps and everything that has to do with the camps [...]. The most important aspect is the housing question [...]. At the root of all their problems is the camp. (Interview held in Rome on 21 November 2013)

In Francesco's opinion, the social exclusion of the Roma is a consequence of their residential segregation and, therefore, to promote their housing inclusion, the municipality should close down the Roma camps. Also Alessandro, member of another association working in Roma informal settlements, believes that the Roma camp is not the product of Roma exclusion but the source of

their continual marginalisation:

Let's be honest: building the Roma camps was a terrible mistake that didn't bring any positive results whatsoever. Only negative ones. In other cities, there are positive examples of Roma people moving out from the camp. This is the direction that we should take because, you know, if I keep you in prison for a lifetime, you'll get used to it, and moving out is the only thing you can do to realise that that's not what life means.

(Interview held in Rome on 22 October 2013)

Similar to Francesco's point of view, Alessandro highlights how living in a Roma camp negatively impacts on different aspects of Roma people's lives, even their mental health. In their opinion, unlike for Andrea and Gregorio mentioned in the previous section, as long as the Roma camps exist, job placement programmes and other attempts aimed at empowering the Roma are doomed to failure. Although several associations share this view, they deploy different strategies to achieve the common goals of closing the camps. For instance, Francesco's association lobbies the local government for the dismantlement of Roma camps and resorts to a human rights discourse, by promoting legal actions that challenge the racial discrimination to which the Roma are subject to. They employ a human rights framework, whereby the ghettoization of the Roma is denounced because it violates the rights of a discriminated ethnic minority. But other associations, like Alessandro's, have more recently developed a different frame through which to claim Roma housing rights.

In the last five years, a number of Roma have joined a series of political squats set up in the Italian capital city by urban squatting movements. For instance, in November 2009 a community of Roma living in an informal settlement in Casilina street, in the eastern periphery of Rome, joined a political squat called Metropoliz with the help of Alessandro's association, which acted as a mediator between the movement and the Roma community. After the eviction, the municipality offered the Roma a relocation to a Roma official centre in the northern periphery of Rome. However, 150 out of 360 Roma rejected the offer and decided to move to Metropoliz, occupied since May 2009. Metropoliz is located in an abandoned factory and, at the end of 2013, hosted mainly Moroccan and Peruvian families, as well as 23 Roma families (Figure 2). This is the first squat (and the one with the largest Roma community) where Roma people cohabit with other homeless migrants and Italians, but since 2009 there have been also other squats involving Roma groups. Not too far from Metropoliz, another squat called Lancio was set up in June 2013. In December 2013, it was home to

about 52 family units, mainly from Central Africa and Eastern Europe, and included a few Roma families too. In these squats the Roma have united with other migrants and Italians, constituting a new political subject, based on their shared socio-economic status of being denied access to housing in times of crisis (Maestri 2014). According to Alessandro:

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 held in Rome on 22 October 2013)

In Alessandro's point of view, the Roma are not merely victims of racial discrimination, nor is their social and housing exclusion due to welfare dependency or to the excessive presence of social workers. Rather the contrary, the Roma housing deprivation is due to the neglect of the state and to the larger housing crisis which was exacerbated by the 2008 economic crisis. In this case, the economic crisis is used as a solidarity framework, enabling alliances between subjects who were previously articulated as different. The negative effects of post-crisis austerity measures have, in fact, become an opportunity for action (Maestri 2014; Spyros 2016).

INSERT HERE

Figure 2: The flat of a Roma family in Metropoliz. Picture taken by Gaja Maestri. 20 November 2013.

The Roma in Metropoliz and Lancio, as with the other migrant and Italian squatters, are presented as urban citizens, whose participation and presence in the urban space entitle them to a series of rights which they are currently denied. For example, the association and movement that set up Metropoliz construct the Roma as victims of the 2008 economic crisis and demand the municipality to cater for their housing needs. These claims are supported by presenting the Roma as victims of the urban effects of the global economic crisis, which led to an increased poverty and privatisation of the urban space, as well as to a retrenchment of welfare provisions. Through a similar framing strategy, the Roma in the Lancio squat are constructed as part of the "Hybrid City" (in Italian "Città Meticcia", see Figure 3), composed by Italians and migrants, who together make up the diversity of the contemporary city and, therefore, demand their rights.

INSERT HERE

Figure 3: A banner just outside the Lancio squat, which reads: “The hybrid city claims rights, demands answers and fights against austerity and precarity”. Picture taken by Gaja Maestri. 20 November 2013.

The presence and participation in the city fabric is used to claim the Roma housing rights by including them in a new political subjectivity articulated within the frame of the right to the city. The meaning of urban citizenship is highly fragmented, but generally refers to a series of entitlements and participation re-scaled at the urban level, and mobilisations that ‘make demands on urban issues’ and ‘use central places in cities for expressing themselves’ (Blokland et al. 2015, 655). The squatters in Metropoliz and Lancio criticise the neoliberal policies of the city and claim their housing rights by occupying abandoned buildings in the urban space. Although urban citizenship includes a wide array of rights, housing rights are increasingly important as the growing commodification and financialisation of the housing market have, mostly after the crisis, undermined access to adequate housing by people on low income (Rolnik 2013). The definition of who is entitled to the right to the city is highly context-specific but, in the case of the political squats analysed in this section, the Roma and the other squatters are constructed as claimants and entitled to housing inclusion because of their presence and participation in the urban life, which has transformed them into bearers of rights regardless of their national formal citizenship. By constituting themselves as squatters, the Roma have claimed their right ‘to the city and *through* the city’ (italics in original) (Blokland et al. 2015, 656) and have politicised their presence in the city in a new way.

Through the emergence of these new political subjectivities, the squatters of Lancio and Metropoliz managed to see their housing rights acknowledged, at least formally. For example, the municipality agreed that, in the case of eviction of Metropoliz, a portion of council housing will be made available to the squatters. However, even this process of political subjectivation is not without potentially negative effects. While constituting themselves as urban citizens apparently works as a strategy for achieving housing inclusion, the category of squatters is a highly stigmatised one, even more so after 2001, when the Italian government introduced increased sanctions over both terrorist organisations and squatters. In addition to this, the political subjectivity of urban citizens seems to be available only to those Roma who decide to join a squatting urban movement. This is highly dependent on the mediation of pro-Roma associations, making it more difficult for isolated Roma communities. As a result, the urban citizenship frame could potentially fragment the solidarities with other Roma

people who still live in camps and in informal settlements and who cannot access the mobilisation resources necessary for this new process of political subjectivation.

Conclusion: the struggles and ambiguities of being political in the camp

This article has shown the complexity of meanings produced around the space of the camp and the Roma political subjectivities, and has aimed to contribute to an understanding of the ways of being political in camp spaces. A number of scholars have pointed out the limitations of an Agambenian approach to the camp for two main reasons: firstly, it overlooks the political agency of camp residents and, secondly, it does not fully portray the multiplicity of non-governmental actors participating in the formation of the camps. For this reason, scholars have suggested alternative interpretations of the camp, namely that of a political space where political subjectivities are also shaped from below, and that of an assemblage space, which emphasises the role of a plethora of state and non-state agencies. While the lens of the camp as political space has been employed to expand our understanding of the multiple ways of being political of Roma camp-dwellers, I have illustrated that also the view of the camp as an assemblage can fruitfully contribute to it.

Through 20 in-depth interviews with members of non-governmental organisations and social movements, I investigated how these actors frame the exclusionary logics underpinning the segregation in Roma camps in order to understand how they articulate the Roma as political beings. In one case, the Roma are constructed as neoliberal citizens and entrepreneurial subjects that claim their right to work and to gain financial independence. However, despite rejecting the representation of the Roma as passive subjects in need of help, this discourse risks reproducing the exclusion in the camp by justifying the neglect of the state and blaming the Roma for their own marginalisation. In the second case, pro-Roma associations have developed a new alliance with social movements, which has enabled the Roma to frame their claims within a discourse of urban citizenship and to demand rights based on their presence and participation in the city fabric. While this framing strategy appears to challenge the exclusion of the Roma, it also potentially worsens their stigmatisation and risks fragmenting the solidarity between different Roma groups.

I believe that the aspects discussed in this article can help us advancing our understanding of political subjectivities both in Roma camps and in camps in general. Regarding the Italian Roma camps, as discussed in the previous paragraph, I highlighted how different ways of being political

have emerged, from forms of European and humanitarian citizenship, to neoliberal and urban ones. This shows that the camp is not a space of exceptionality but is very much permeated by broader changes in governmental technologies and practices of resistance. In addition to this, the analysis of the Italian case can shed light on two main aspects of citizenship-making processes in camp spaces. The first is the contentious nature of being political, which is generated through a constant process of struggle within and around the camp, involving a plurality of actors, from the government at its various scales, to residents and civil society associations. As argued by Rygiel (2011, 13), far from being pre-determined, 'the meaning of the camp itself becomes a site of a struggle', which is therefore crucially important to bring into the analysis in order to more fully comprehend how the politics of control, solidarity and resistance work. The second aspect regards the ambiguity of political subjectivities and acts of citizenship. Strategies and discourses of claim-making are never univocal and can engender multiple and unexpected effects. For this reason, labelling these claims as either successful or failing would mean assuming that the effects of these acts are limited to the intentions of the actors involved in them, while resistance can also go beyond intentionality as observed by Hughes (2016). Like a form of 'desertion', these struggles to demand rights can be seen as 'politically significant acts that neither simply reproduce nor fully transcend citizenship as a "regime" or series of governing practices, and are thus neither purely conservative nor purely emancipatory in their formation' (Squire 2015, 505).

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Diana Martin and Sarah Hughes for their help with the original version of the paper. I am also thankful to the two anonymous reviewers for the extremely helpful comments which crucially contributed to the improvement of the article. Special thanks go to Engin Isin who offered incredibly important support in the first stage of this work.

Bibliography

- Agamben, G. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Anghel, I. M. 2015. "Contesting Neoliberal Governance. The Case of Romanian Roma." *Social Change Review The Journal of "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu* 13 (2): 85–109.
- Alunni, L. 2012. "'After all, they are Nomads, aren't they?': Roma Transnationalism and Health

Issues.” In: *MMG Working Paper*. Gottingen: Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, 7–24.

Aradau, C., J. Huysmans, P. G. Macioti, and V. Squire. 2013. “Mobility Interrogating Free Movement: Roma Acts of European Citizenship.” In *Enacting European Citizenship*, edited by E. Isin and M. Saward, 132–154. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Armillei, R. 2015. “The ‘Camps System’ in Italy: Corruption, Inefficiencies and Practices of Resistance.” [online] romanistudies.eu. Available at: <<http://romanistudies.eu/the-camps-system-in-italy/>> [Accessed 3 Mar. 2016].

Associazione 21 Luglio. 2014. *Campi Nomadi s.p.a. Segregare, concentrare e allontanare i rom. I costi a Roma nel 2013* [Nomad Camps Ltd. Segregating, Concentrating and Sending Away the Roma. The Costs in Rome in 2013]. Frosinone: Nuova Stampa.

Atger, A.F. 2013. “European citizenship revealed: sites, actors and Roma access to justice in the EU.” In *Enacting European Citizenship*, edited by E. Isin and M. Saward, 178–194. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge

van Baar, H. 2012. “Socio-Economic Mobility and Neo-Liberal Governmentality in Post-Socialist Europe: Activation and the Dehumanisation of the Roma.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38 (8): 1289–1304.

Blokland, T., C. Hentschel, A. Holm, H. Lebuhn and T. Margalit. 2015. “Urban citizenship and right to the city: the fragmentation of claims.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39 (4): 655–665.

Brown, W. 2010. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. New York: Zone Books.

Bulley, D. 2014. “Inside the Tent: Community and Government in Refugee Camps.” *Security Dialogue* 45 (1): 63–80.

Butler, J. and G. C. Spivak. 2007. *Who Sings the Nation State? Language, Politics, Belonging*. London New York Calcutta: Seagull Books.

Çağlar, A. and S. Mehling. 2013. “Sites and the scales of the law: third-country nationals and EU Roma citizens.” In *Enacting European Citizenship*, edited by E. Isin and M. Saward, 155–177. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge

Clough Marinaro, I. 2009. “Between Surveillance and Exile: Biopolitics and the Roma in Italy.” *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 1 (2): 265–287.

Clough Marinaro, I. and U. Daniele. 2011. “Roma and humanitarianism in the Eternal City.” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16 (5): 621–636.

Clough Marinaro, I. and U. Daniele. 2014. “A failed Roma revolution: Conflict, fragmentation and status quo maintenance in Rome.” *Ethnicities* 14 (6): 775–792.

Dalla Zuanna, G. 2013. *La popolazione in forte disagio abitativo in Italia. La condizione dei richiedenti asilo, dei rifugiati e dei Rom* [The People Experiencing Severe Housing Deprivation in Italy. The

Condition of Asylum-Seekers, Refugees and Roma]. Cittalia - ANCI.

Daniele, U. 2011. “‘Nomads’ in the Eternal City. Local policies and Roma participation in the ‘emergency’ era.” *Géocarrefour* 86 (1): 15–23.

European Roma Rights Center. 2000. *Campland. Racial segregation of Roma in Italy*. Country Report Series.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2012. *The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States. Survey results at a glance*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Feldman, I. 2014. “What Is a Camp? Legitimate Refugee Lives in Spaces of Long-Term Displacement.” *Geoforum* 66: 244–252.

Giaccaria, P. and Claudio Minca. 2011. “Topographies/Topologies of the Camp: Auschwitz as a Spatial Threshold.” *Political Geography* 30 (1): 3–12

Gregory, D. 2006. “The Black Flag: Guantánamo Bay and the Space of Exception.” *Geografiska Annaler. Series B: Human Geography*, 88 (4), pp.405–427.

Harvey, D. 2005. *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hughes, S. 2016. “Beyond Intentionality: Exploring Creativity and Resistance within a UK Immigration Removal Centre.” *Citizenship Studies*, 20 (3-4): 427–443.

Isin, E. 2002. *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Isin, E. and G. M. Nielsen. 2008. *Acts of Citizenship*. London-New York: Zed Books.

Isin, E., and K. Rygiel. 2007. “Abject Spaces: Frontiers, Zones, Camps.” In *The Logics of Biopower and the War on Terror: Living, Dying, Surviving*, edited by E. Dauphinee and C. Masters, 181–203. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Maestri, G. 2014. “The Economic Crisis as Opportunity: How Austerity Generates New Strategies and Solidarities for Negotiating Roma Access to Housing in Rome.” *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 18 (6): 808–823.

Marshall, T.H. 2009. “Citizenship and Social Class.” In *Inequality and Society*, edited by J. Manza and M. Sauder, 148–154. London: Norton and Co.

Martin, D. 2015. “From Spaces of Exception to ‘Campscapes’: Palestinian Refugee Camps and Informal Settlements in Beirut.” *Political Geography*, 44: 9–18.

Marušák, M., and L. Singer. 2009. “Social Unrest in Slovakia 2004: Romani Reaction to Neoliberal ‘Reforms.’” In *Romani Politics in Contemporary Europe: Poverty, Ethnic Mobilization, and the Neoliberal Order*, edited by N. Sigona and N. Trehan, 186–208. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Minca, C. 2015. “Geographies of the Camp.” *Political Geography*, 49: 74–83.

Piasere, L. 2006. “Che cos’è un campo nomadi? [What is a Nomad Camp]?” *Achab*, 8: 8–16.

- Puggioni, R. 2014. "Against Camps' Violence: Some Voices on Italian Holding Centres." *Political Studies* 62 (4): 945–960.
- Ramadan, A. 2013. "Spatialising the Refugee Camp." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38 (1): 65–77.
- Redclift, V. 2013. "Subjects or Agents? Camps, Contests and the Creation of 'Political Space'." *Citizenship Studies* 17 (3-4): 308–321.
- Rolnik, R. 2013. "Late Neoliberalism: The Financialization of Homeownership and Housing Rights." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37 (3): 1058–1066.
- Rygiel, K. 2011. "Bordering Solidarities: Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement and Camps at Calais." *Citizenship Studies* 15 (1): 1–19.
- Rygiel, K. 2012. "Politicizing Camps: Forging Transgressive Citizenships in and through Transit." *Citizenship Studies* 16 (5-6): 807–825.
- Sigona, N. 2005. "Locating 'The Gypsy Problem'. The Roma in Italy: Stereotyping, Labelling and 'Nomad Camps.'" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31 (4): 741–56.
- Sigona, N. 2011. "The Governance of Romani People in Italy: Discourse, Policy and Practice." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16 (5): 590–606.
- Sigona, N. 2015. "Campzanship: Reimagining the Camp as a Social and Political Space." *Citizenship Studies* 19 (1): 1–15.
- Sigona, N. 2016. "Everyday Statelessness in Italy." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39 (2): 263–279.
- Spyros, T. 2016. "The Time of the Roma in Times of Crisis: Where Has European Neoliberal Capitalism Failed?" *Ethnicities* 16 (3): 432–51.
- Squire, V. 2009. *The Exclusionary Politics of Asylum*. Migration, Minorities, Citizenship. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Squire, V. 2015. "Acts of Desertion: The Ambiguities of Abandonment and Renouncement across the Sonoran Borderzone." *Antipode* 47 (2): 500–516.
- Suvarierol, S. and K. Kirk. 2014. "Dutch Civic Integration Courses as Neoliberal Citizenship Rituals." *Citizenship Studies* 19 (3-4): 248–266.
- Trehan, N. 2009. "The Romani Subaltern within Neoliberal European Civil Society: NGOization of Human Rights and Silent voices." In *Romani Politics in Contemporary Europe: Poverty, Ethnic Mobilization, and the Neoliberal Order*, edited by N. Sigona and N. Trehan, 51–71. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Voiculescu, C. 2017. "European Social Integration as Neoliberal Governmentality: Epistemological Colonisation of the Subject." In *European Social Integration and the Roma: Questioning Neoliberal Governmentality*, edited by C. Voiculescu, 22–28. Oxon: Routledge.