

Colonial refractions: the 'Gypsy camp' as a spatio-racial political technology

Giovanni Picker, Margaret Greenfields & David Smith

Abstract

Camps for civilians first appeared in the colonies. Largely drawing on the literature on colonialism and race, this article conceptualizes the 'Gypsy camp' in Western European cities as a spatio-racial political technology. We first discuss the shift, starting with decolonization, from colonial to metropolitan technologies of the governance of social heterogeneity. We then relate this broad historical framing to the ideas and ideologies that since the 1960s have been underpinning the planning and governance of the 'Gypsy camp' in both the UK and Italy. We document the 1970s emergence of a new and distinctive type of camp that was predicated upon a racially connoted tension between policies criminalizing sedentarization and ideologies of cultural protection. Given that the imposition of the 'Gypsy camp' was essentially uncontested, we argue that the conditions of possibility for it to emerge and become institutionalized were both a spatio-racial similarity with typically colonial technologies of governance, and the fact that it was largely perceived as a self-evident necessity for the governance and control of one specific population. We conclude by calling for more analyses on this and other forms of urban confinement in both the Global North and South, in order to account for the increasingly disquieting mushrooming of confining and controlling governance devices, practices and ideologies.

Introduction

In 1974, architect and artist Constant Nieuwenhuys completed his 18-year-long project 'The New Babylon', which today is considered one of the most powerful works of the Situationist International. Inspired by a radical anti-capitalist utopia, the project outlined the perfectly free city, drawing on the idea that 'A person [...] cannot make the greatest use of his [*sic*] freedom in a world ruled by the clock and the imperative of a fixed abode' (Nieuwenhuys 1974, 3). The architect got his original inspiration during a visit to the town of Alba, North-western Italy, where a local group of 'Gypsies' had just been given a piece of land: 'They'd closed off the space between some caravans with planks and petrol cans, they'd made an enclosure, a "Gypsy Town"' (Nieuwenhuys 1974, 1). The notion of 'Gypsies' living in 'Gypsy towns' outwith the rules of capitalist modern urban life is still globally prevalent today. However, unlike the architect's utopian project, over the last 50 years state-driven sedentarization policies addressing 'Gypsies' across Western Europe have been using that notion in highly ambivalent ways, often ending up enclosing Roma, Gypsies and Travellers (hereafter RGT) in urban peripheral camps.

This article explores the emergence and governance of those camps, focusing on the cases of Britain and Italy.¹ In providing the first cross-national analysis of 'Gypsy camps',² we raise the following question: 'Under which historical–political conditions and following which ideologies have those urban devices of socio-spatial confinement emerged and how could they persist until today?' By discussing in detail the continuities between ideologies of racial division and classification which informed the governance of colonized populations, and the main ideologies behind RGT camp policies and

governance practices, we aim to contribute to a renewed understanding of enclosure and governance at the edge of 21st-century cities globally. Drawing on both the literature on those colonial continuities and Foucault's (1977) notion of 'political technology' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982) we argue that the 'Gypsy camp' can heuristically be viewed as a *spatio-racial political technology*, namely, as a largely supported and self-legitimizing policy device which sanctions the perfect juxtaposition of a racially connoted marginalized population with a secluded urban location, eventually crystallizing racist perceptions and public attitudes towards RGT onto the urban space and landscape.

Detecting these dynamics is crucial, in order to understand the emergence of a distinct type of socio-spatial enclosure and containment right at the heart of post-Second World War European democracies. The drive to sedentarize nomadic populations in isolated places stemmed from the governmental presumption, emergent across Europe during the 1960s, that itinerants needed a place to stop in order to become incrementally integrated into mainstream society without totally losing their 'way of life'. Hence, during the 1960s, publicly owned and controlled campsites for RGT, varying in form and size, began to appear at the periphery of large and mid-size towns in a number of Western European countries. The 1968 Caravan Act in the UK, for example, which resulted in the construction of camps in urban and rural municipalities; the similar 1968 Caravan Act (*Wohnwagenwet*) in the Netherlands which ordered the development of stopping places for caravan-dwelling Sinti and Roma, whilst the drive for 'Itinerant Settlement' in Ireland led to the development of peri-urban camps (Gmelch and Gmelch 1974). Moreover, the first 'halting sites' for 'nomads' in late 1970s Italy—which appeared close to where Nieuwenhuys' utopian idea was conceived—replicated this European-wide sedentarization and 'normalization' approach to RGT populations. Finally, in France, although only the 1990 Besson Law ordered the construction of 'equipped areas' (*terrains aménagés*) for 'travelling people' (*gens du voyage*) at the periphery of towns with more than 5000 inhabitants, sedentarization policies started with the 3 January 1969 law.

After critically reviewing theories of camp formations by emphasizing the importance of colonial ideologies of population governance within them, we will analyse the main ideological stances behind the design, implementation and governance of the 'Gypsy camp' in the UK and Italy over the last 50 years. While we are aware that each national and urban context has its unique distinctions, we consider those two national cases as representative of the European context, because they account for both North-western and Southern Europe. We subsequently engage in a discussion of our argument of the 'Gypsy camp' as a spatio-racial political technology. In the conclusion we stress the need for more historically informed research on these spatio-racial devices, building comparison with other types of 'durable camps' across the Global South–North divide.

Colonial domination, camps and racial governance: uncovering the nexus

'The camp' is frequently described as the figure par excellence of modernity, in which territorial sovereignty permits, and even prescribes, the suspension of the rule of law—a prototypical example of the Schmittian 'state of exception' (Agamben 1998; Diken and Laustsen 2006; Ek 2006; Isin and Rygiel 2007). However, while proposing comprehensive theoretical and empirical accounts of different camp formations, this body of literature largely overlooks today's implications of one of the most distinct features of European modernity, that is, colonialism and its manufacturing of peculiar

ideologies of governance. In his seminal essay on Agamben and the spatialities of the camp, geographer Ek (2006, 369) recalls that one of *Homo sacer's* chapters refers to camps' colonial origins. The geographer draws on Foucault's (2003) reflections on 'racial wars' to remind the reader that 'Colonial models were brought back to the West with something resembling colonization as a result: an internal colonization' (Ek 2006, 369). However, this thoughtful reflection seems only a background sketch as colonialism's direct implications on today's camp formations and their governance remain largely overlooked. A similar conclusion can be drawn about the debate on the camp–city nexus (Agier 2002; Bauman 2002; Malkki 2002; Sanyal 2012).

Further, recent debates on the politicization of camps and camp residents (Ramadan 2013; Redclift 2013; Sigona 2014), although innovatively uncovering the largely neglected issue of agency and political mobilization, leave the colonial origins of the relationships between residents and institutional actors out of the picture. Finally, Agamben (2007) himself addressed the importance of looking at the 'dislocation and dishomogeneity' between metropolis and colony, in order to understand 'dislocation and dishomogeneity' *within* contemporary cities; here again, however, the nexus between colonies and metropole remains a sort of background historical issue without situated implications for present-day phenomena. More generally, 'Agamben maintains a relative silence about colonialism' (Svirsky and Bignall 2012, 3; see also Shenhav 2012, 20 *et passim*).

In order to uncover the historical nexus between colonial domination and contemporary 'Gypsy camps', we extend recent and ongoing inquiries into the shift from colonial to metropolitan governance of urban populations. Comaroff (1998) insightfully discusses the metropolitan 'manufacture of sameness' vs. the colonial 'production of difference' ('dishomogeneity' in Agamben's terms) through hierarchical racial classification:

'Here, in a nutshell, lay the roots of the contrast between metropolitan and colonial governance, even when the second was merely an extension "overseas" of the first: one depended, for its existence, on the ideological work of manufacturing sameness, of engendering a horizontal sense of fraternity; the other, despite its rhetoric of universalising modernity, was concerned with the practical management, often the production, of difference. Imperial regimes abroad were always caught up in a "doubling", a contradiction: at the very same time as they spoke of *transforming colonised peoples into civilised—i.e. "modern"—free, right-bearing citizens*, they dealt in heterogeneity by naturalising ethnic difference and *essentialising racial inequality*. The former was entailed, if nothing else, in converting "savages" into proletarians. The latter was implicit in the grammar of cultural diversity, and in the organic anthropology, on which were erected the hierarchical structures of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial rule.' (329; emphases added)

Here the anthropologist synthesizes a phenomenon, which occurred differently in different colonies, and was certainly not driven by a monolithic 'colonizer' with always-consistent interests throughout the whole colonial period (Stoler 1989, 137–138; Steinmetz 2008, 590). However, if we maintain Comaroff's analysis as valid, in the case of 'Gypsy camps' we can detect the same contradiction that 'imperial regimes' were 'caught up in'. As we will show in detail in the next two sections, the main tension underpinning the logic of functioning of 'Gypsy camps' in Britain and Italy is exactly between

sedentarizing and thus socially integrating RGT ('transforming colonized peoples into civilized'), as well as protecting their essential cultural traits ('naturalizing ethnic difference').

Historically, the shift from colonial to metropolitan governance commenced with the first decolonizing forces in the 1930s. Previously uncontested ideologies of biologically driven racial classifications progressively gave way, without being totally dismissed, to different, certainly not alternative, systems of ordering and valuing social organizations, including urban space. This shift 'from measuring bodies and heads, to the racial mappings, sociologically and psychologically, of urban spaces' (Goldberg 2002, 174, 177) is crucial for our analysis, because, as our empirical and comparative discussions will uncover, it also pertains to the state-led formation of 'Gypsy camps' in Europe. As Goldberg (1993, 191) elsewhere explained, 'The principle of racialized urban segregation accordingly insinuated itself into the definition of post-colonial city space in the West, just as it continued to inform post-independence urban planning in Africa.' Hence, the urban space of the post-colonial European city is informed by forms of knowledge and technologies of governance with which colonial urban planners and administrators were very well acquainted.

We will empirically show that this nexus between colonial and 'Gypsy' governance is chiefly mediated by race and racial inequality, and that it is precisely due to the historical deep-rootedness of colonial practices of governance through race that the 'Gypsy camp' appears, to both the state and civil society organizations, as an inevitable and proper solution for re-educating or 'socially integrating' an always potentially deviant population. This inevitability suggests that the 'Gypsy camp' can heuristically be viewed as a 'political technology' (Foucault 1977) first introduced in *Discipline and Punish*, with reference to the Panopticon, that is, the round-shaped carceral building which makes inmates locked into the cells at the outer perimeter feel constantly watched by the guard standing on a tower in the middle of the building. The Panopticon is for Foucault an object 'which may and must be detached from its specific use', because its perfection as architectural construct does not allow for any criticism or antagonism; its self-evident functionality eschews any sort of possible attack, it being a self-evident 'positive' construct (see also Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). Similarly, we will show in the two empirical sections that the 'Gypsy camp' appears as a self-evident 'positive' construct, serving the goal of sedentarizing and protecting a particular population.

With this historic-theoretical background in place, in the following two sections we will discuss the historical formation of the 'Gypsy camp' in the UK and Italy. We will trace in detail how racial ideologies and urban/state policy intersected in the making of those camps. In the subsequent section we will put forward and discuss our argument about the 'Gypsy camp' as a spatio-racial political technology.

Urban 'Gypsy camps': the British context

Sibley (1998) argues that the associations between people and place embodied in stereotypical representations suggest a distance from civilization and order similar to the hierarchical classification of races that justified colonial expansion. In this sense the 'Gypsy camp' represents a form of 'administered squalor' comprising a 'disciplining grid' whereby inhabitants are required to adapt their behaviour and modes of interaction to dominant notions of spatial order. The 'Gypsy camp', writes Sibley (1998, 126),

‘demonstrate[s] how the state attempts to isolate and then transform a discrepant minority, discrepant in this case because of its ethnicity and nomadic tradition. The attempt to regulate the lives of gypsies on sites ... is an instance of a “micro-form” of discipline, which is functional within a larger system.’

Historically, the ‘Gypsy problem’ in Britain and efforts to enforce such discipline were focused on ‘masterless’ households or ‘tribes’ roaming the land without any allegiance to sedentary society (Mayall 1995). By the mid-20th century, the ‘problem’ resulted from the declining position of Gypsies and other itinerants in relation to majority society as demand for their labour and tolerance of their ‘difference’ declined. Policy responses seeking to enforce sedentarization through making a nomadic life increasingly untenable represented one element of an assimilationist strategy targeted at ‘outsiders’ and ‘deviants’ which had developed throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Young (1999) argues that the response towards ‘deviants’ in an era of ‘inclusive’ societies characterized by industrial growth, rising immigration and expanding citizenship rights, was to regard them not as *external* enemies but as ‘someone who must be socialised, rehabilitated, cured until he or she is like us’ (5). In this period, Gypsies were increasingly regarded as an anomaly in an ever more ordered society and in need of resocialization through settlement (Kofman and LeBas 2003).

The hierarchical classification of space and ‘permitted’ forms of habitation is clearly related to the regulation of marginal racialized groups (Sibley 1981). This first became noticeable during the 18th and 19th centuries with the stigmatizing construction of Irish immigrants as a subaltern pathologized group (Swift and Gilley 1985). The arrival of large numbers of East European Jewry in the late 19th century meanwhile led to the passing of the first immigration control legislation, the 1905 Aliens Act, which categorized certain groups as undesirable. Gypsies had long been a recognizable element of the British cultural context and were not immune from the racialization of their supposed characteristics and living habits. When viewed through a ‘racial lens’ modes of life could be aligned with the pseudo-scientific classifications popularized by the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) founded in 1888. In its early years the GLS’s mission was to document and record the ‘inevitable’ decline of a unique ‘primitive’ culture due to increased urbanization and intermixing with the urban poor, which were regarded as detrimental to the cultural and moral well-being of the Romani people.³ A complex classificatory system was devised by members of the GLS which reified the racial ‘purity’ of dark-skinned, ‘traditional’ Romani and relegated ‘half-breed’ Gypsies to the status of ‘didikois’, whilst indigenous Scottish and Irish Travellers were located at the bottom of the hierarchy and dismissed as mere ‘tinkers’ (Hayes 2006).

By the mid-20th century the preoccupation with racial categorization and perceived ‘natural’ characteristics of nomadic Gypsies underwent a metamorphosis partly prompted by the discrediting of Social Darwinist ideologies. The question of where and how Gypsies should be located in the post-war project of national reconstruction, however, retained a racialized discourse which has remained a persistent theme in policy discussions. In the immediate post-war era, political concern was focused on ‘bombed-out’ or homeless city dwellers dwelling in unregulated, often squalid caravan encampments often alongside Gypsies and other travelling people (Burnett 1986). In response the 1960 Caravan Sites Act required licensing of caravan sites and placed restrictions on where caravans could be located. This reduced the number of sites with the intent of acting as a ‘half-way’ house to encourage caravan dwellers to settle, take up regular employment and access public services (see the Parliamentary discussion in Hansard, 1 December 1961).

The concern to place non-Gypsy caravan dwellers into conventional housing was informed by a racialized discourse which separated those (generally poor, homeless and/or destitute) sections of the population who had adopted caravan-dwelling as a necessity, from 'tinkers', 'didikois' and 'true' Gypsies. The tensions inherent in Parliamentary debates of the period stressed 'integration' of Gypsies on the one hand whilst permitting of a phased adoption of settlement since 'the Romanies are still with us after hundreds of years suggests that the pace cannot be forced' (Hansard, 1 December 1961, 803). Following the 1960 Act, a political and media debate ensued over the wisdom of the state providing camp accommodation targeted specifically at Gypsies (Dodds 1966). Care was taken to avoid suggestions of enforced, geographical exclusion along racial lines and even a major national newspaper *The Times* (known for its conservative views) noted disapprovingly in 1967 that 'the totalitarian solution would be forcible integration ... present policy drifts in that direction, for it is coming close to making outlaw of the travellers'. These concerns ran parallel to a conviction that in the longer term, nomadic communities would recognize that their needs were best met by settlement and assimilation. In one of many similar references in Hansard (24 May 1968, 1176) an MP cites a local authority document stating that the provision of permanent accommodation either on campsites or in residential centres represented a 'first step in the process of enabling the gypsy to return to the community'.

Despite an ideological commitment to settlement underpinned by a distinctive form of spatio-racial political technology, the 1968 Caravan Sites Act, which placed a statutory obligation on local authorities to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers 'residing in or passing through' their localities was an expensive failure through a lack of political will to deliver adequate amounts of the promised high-quality accommodation and vociferous local opposition among the 'settled' population to having 'Gypsy camps' in their vicinity. Although the legislation is couched in non-racial terms, defining 'Gypsies' as individuals who travel for economic purposes, as illustrated above, both central and local government discourse repeatedly emphasize the supposed racialized characteristics of Gypsies and the need to find a humane way of encouraging them to give up nomadism. Such debates typically reiterated a hierarchy of racial 'authenticity' referring to 'the real Gypsies' who were regarded as more 'decent' and malleable than Irish and other Travellers who were (and still are) widely seen as an itinerant criminally inclined subculture. Hence Gypsies, of all the nomadic groups, were considered more likely to accept assimilation by stealth through providing 'a permanent improvement with sites under control where they can live and where their children can go to school so that they may learn a different way of life' (Hansard, 23 May 1969, 864).

In the longer term, the 1968 legislation reinforced the racialized exclusion of Gypsies and Travellers through locating sites far from the surrounding community often in extremely undesirable locations. Once a locality had provided a minimum quota of site provision it could apply for 'designated' status accompanied by legislative tools allowing harsher measures and speedier expulsions against those who continued to resort to unauthorized camps. Local authorities were thus presented with the perfect mechanism to control and spatially segregate Gypsies and Travellers. Spatial control through settlement onto permanent camps and spatial cleansing via expulsion from unauthorized camping grounds has created a legacy of displacement and cultural loss; dependence on welfare benefits; poor health outcomes and (for many) a nostalgic yearning for a former way of life (Smith and Greenfields 2013). The situation of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK bears close resemblance to the impacts of

colonization on First Nation and Aboriginal people as well as displaced Palestinians living in refugee camps (see Australian Institute of Health & Welfare [2009](#); Pasquetti [2015](#)).

The geo-physical location of many sites has reinforced both the ability to control the population through segregation and isolation and conveyed the message that those located in such areas were fit for nothing else, reinforcing racialized stereotypes associating Gypsies with dirt, crime and disorder (Belton [2005](#)). The impacts of such racialized spaces are found in 'immediate and oppressive policing' (McVeigh [1997](#), 22) based on stereotypes of Gypsies and Travellers as a primitive and barbaric minority in need of 'civilizing' (Powell [2007](#)). The relatively under-monitored and inconsistent policing practices regarding the surveillance and control of sites and site residents, suggests that public camps are indeed 'administrative states of exception' where the rule of law, if not outright suspended, is treated in an arbitrary manner and lacks the protections usually afforded to citizens.

Urban camps for 'nomads': the Italian context

In a 2000 well-known publication, the non-governmental organization (NGO) European Roma Rights Centre defined Italy a 'Campland' (ERRC [2000](#)), talking about the 'racial segregation' of Roma. When in 2008 the Ministry of Interior ordered a census of people living in camps in Rome, Milan and Naples, the result was '167 encampments, out of which 124 unauthorised, and 43 authorised' (Ministero dell'Interno [2010](#)). That census is a clear example of how easy it is to arbitrarily impose exceptions on the governance of what the media often refers to as 'nomad camps'. Firstly, the census was the result of a government decree declaring 'the state of emergency in relation to settlements of communities of nomads', directly referring to legislation on 'natural calamities and disasters' (Vassallo Paleologo [2010](#)); this was a clear exception to the law. Secondly, explicitly targeting 'nomads' through measures including the collection of fingerprints, clearly showed that race plays a pivotal role in inspiring the government's decisions and actions (Daniele [2010](#), 95).

This tightly woven system of segregation has its origins in the post-Second World War state management of 'the Gypsy problem' (*il problema degli zingari*), that is, a widespread expression referring to marginalized Roma who were perceived as 'difficult-to-integrate' subjects. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the state explicitly sanctioned vagrancy and nomadism, bearing two main goals. First, policing vagrancy by impeding 'nomads' to stop and camp without permission; second, attempting to sedentarize 'Gypsies'. The first goal was to be achieved by direct police actions, sanctioned by three Ministry of Interior issued circulars which were implemented in 1973, 1982 and 1995. The second goal was to be achieved by delegating in 1965 the education of 'Gypsy children' to Nomad Work (NW), that is, a large charity, with a 1965 agreement between the Ministry of Interior and NW, giving the charity full powers for organizing school services for Roma children across the country.

This state-cum-civil-society apparatus engaged immediately in a number of initiatives together with local and regional councils. One of the results was the March 1979 construction of the first camp for Roma and Sinti (Picker [2013](#), 280). Drawing on that first experience, between 1984 and 1992 after consulting with NW 'experts', 12 regional councils passed as many laws ordering the construction of camps. At that time camps were policy answers to regional councilmen's main dilemmas, namely, how to protect an alleged nomadic lifestyle, while encouraging sedentarization. This problem was largely based on erroneous stereotypes, as many of the Romani families at that time were from Yugoslavia,

where only a tiny minority of Roma still undertook a nomadic way of life. This incongruity between representation and reality can be explained by looking at the early 1970s changes in migration governance, in which the police started playing a major role (Lucassen [2011](#)). Directly responding to the Ministry of Interior, the Italian police became since the 1973 circular the main state actor responsible for securing public order against the seemingly threatening presence of the 'Gypsies'.

While in the late 1960s and 1970s, camps were unanimously accepted as the best social inclusion tools for 'nomads' in the 1980s and even more prominently in the 1990s, they progressively imposed spatial isolation and segregation (Piasere [2006](#); Picker [2011](#); Roccheggiani 2013). Not only because camps became rapidly overpopulated due to the continuous arrivals of people in the aftermath of Tito's death (1980), the Bosnian war (1992) and the Kosovo war (1997–99), but also by the early 1990s Europe-wide burgeoning media obsession with petty crimes and urban security, scapegoating the urban poor and marginalized migrants through xenophobic discourses. Italy led the way in this, not least thanks to the growing influence of the Northern League (Dal Lago [2009](#)).

Let us now consider more attentively, in light of the history sketched thus far, the European Roma Rights Centre's expression 'racial segregation', asking why in the late 1990s race appeared as an organizing principle of segregation. This leads us to look at some of the most influential works of the 1960s and 1970s about 'nomadism' and 'Gypsies'. The Gypsy Studies Centre was founded in 1965 as the intellectual laboratory of NW's actions. The Centre's director, Professor Mirella Karpati, a pedagogist of the University of Padua and the most influential theorist in the field of 'Gypsology',⁴ maintained that Gypsies were characterized by a

'congenital psycho-moral instability [...] Their wandering has taken roots in their hearts to such an extent that it has become one of their specific connotations. Roma and Sinti people are not "Gypsy" because they travel; rather, they travel because they are "Gypsy".' (Karpati [1962](#), 92, 141)

This unstable character, according to Karpati, was the reason for Gypsies' 'anti-social behaviour'. According to Roccheggiani (2013), this conceptualization was a somewhat *renewed version of the pre-Second World War Fascist racial ideologies*, according to which 'The psycho-moral quality of Gypsy race is defined as a psychological regressive race mutation', in the words of Semizzi ([1939](#), 70), Professor of Social Medicine at the University of Padua and Venice, and one of the signatories of the 1938 Race Manifesto (see also Bravi [2009](#), 44–45; Picker and Roccheggiani [2014](#), 193).

Therefore, although not explicitly invoking the concept of race (*razza*), the very idea of nomadism as an innate and hereditary characteristic definitely recalls racial classifications. Suffice to mention here Italian anthropologist Lombroso ([1876](#)), who dedicated a section to Gypsies in his *L'uomo delinquente* [*The Delinquent Man*], defining them as 'a whole race of criminals, having all of criminals' typical characteristics including idleness, cowardice, wrath, vanity, love for orgies and ferocity' (330). Transposed from typically 19th-century bio-moral to updated psycho-social characteristics, nomadism was clearly seen by Karpati as the Gypsies' hardly changeable characteristic. According to Karpati, instead of trying to change 'nomads', they should be provided with the necessary material conditions to adapt their own 'psycho-moral instability' to the majority society's sedentary habits; camps were the most urgent and important of those material conditions. Viewed from this perspective, those camps clearly were racist and racist devices, socio-spatial configurations which were there to

contain an alleged *racial threat*, that is, Gypsies' hardly changeable psycho-moral characteristics, first and foremost, their wandering, which is considered to be the reason for Gypsies' anti-social behaviour. This sanctioning of inferiority, this indelible origin inscribed in their behaviour, was indeed framed within the alleged continuum of civilization, in which 'Gypsies–nomads' were seen as having 'no sociability, or a lower level of sociability' (*livello inferiore di socialità*) in comparison with non-Gypsies, in the words of Flores d'Arcais (1967, 6), the then director of the Institute of Pedagogy at Padua University.

Today those camps are useful devices for the governance of the postindustrial city, where the urban poor and racially deemed would otherwise become the unsustainable cost which political economy categorically rejects. In line with the 2008 census discussed at the incipit of this section, current evidence on Italian camps' governance suggests that the police and other state authorities are likely to act beyond the law (e.g. Saitta 2008). The most outstanding example is probably the nation-wide toleration of three generations of undocumented 'Yugoslav citizens' in camps (Picker and Roccheggiani 2014). The discussion of the British and Italian types of camp suggests that in the late 1960s and beginning of the 1970s a distinctive device of urban governance emerged.

The 'Gypsy camp' as a spatio-racial political technology

The cases of the UK and Italy shed light on an important historical phenomenon: since the end of the 1960s a new policy device has emerged, the 'Gypsy camp', aiming to control and socially integrate subjects who were invariably deemed to be at a lower level of 'civilization'. The persistence after almost 40 years of this policy device, as also discussed in the empirical sections, accounts for the virtually uncontested and self-evidently 'positive' nature of this device of control and social integration. One of the main reasons of the overall lack of opposition is the deep-rootedness of the rationale behind this policy device. As we have shown in the two empirical sections, the tension between cultural protection and sedentarization, which in Italy was primarily sustained by the 1970s legacy of Fascist expert knowledge on 'Gypsies', and in the UK governed by an evolutionist spatial politics of isolation and state control, was the direct response to the alleged 'Gypsy backwardness', as racially understood. These processes were firmly rooted in the late 19th-century theorizations of 'who RGT are', epitomized in the UK by the GLS, and in Italy by the criminological thinking that later on translated into the racial Fascist doctrines.

From this point of view, race can be seen as the ordering principle of the 'Gypsy camp'. A principle which does not only sanction the presence of many RGT families in urban periphery camps, but more broadly regulates the relations between the camps and the city. As we discussed in the theoretical section, urban partitioning in the post-colonial West begun in the 1930s, progressively translating 'classic' racial thinking, into a less 'biological' and more 'spatio-racial' state practices and idioms of governing the city. Moreover, on a theoretical level, striking similarities can be detected between 'Gypsy camp' governance in both countries and what Comaroff (1998) calls 'doubling', that is, the contradiction imperial powers were caught in—on the one hand civilizing the colonized, on the other, essentializing their ethnic difference exacerbating in this way racial inequalities.

By tracing the details of logics and ideologies of state and civil society governance in the two countries, we have shown that the 'Gypsy camps' emerged and developed without being contested by

governance actors. Not only—civil society actors such as NW in Italy were on the frontline in supporting the construction of camps. This leads us to view a fundamental similarity between the ‘Gypsy camp’ and the Panopticon as a political technology. The similarity does not lie so much in the fenced shape nor in the effect of reducing residents’ freedom and mobility, but perhaps more importantly in the symbolic effect of discouraging critical dissection. Neither the circular architectural monster ensuring that each inmate feels watched upon, nor the fenced structure for re-educating and sanctioning RGT have been met by strong opposition. They are both part of a *doxa*, which ensures the separation and encapsulation of an unwanted population while remaining squarely within the rule of law, which indeed does not only allow but also foresees the state of exception. In the case of the ‘Gypsy camp’, it is a raceless *doxa*, a particular ideology which suppresses any possibility of racial hierarchy, and therefore prevents awareness including of the theoretical and historical nexus between colonial and metropolitan governance. However, as we showed in the empirical section, race plays the pivotal role in governing and maintaining the ‘Gypsy camp’.

Conclusion

Through a discussion of the UK and Italian experiences, we have argued that the ‘Gypsy camp’ can heuristically be viewed as a spatio-racial political technology. We have shown that a racialized/ing understanding of RGT has basically informed ‘Gypsy camp’ policies in both countries. In order to explain and ground our argument, we have discussed how racial ideas and understandings informing the governance of populations have their origins in the colonial management of both people and urban spaces. Shedding light on this colonial connection has allowed us not only to discuss the precise historical backgrounds of the ‘Gypsy camp’, but also to understand why such racist policy device could emerge in the heart of liberal democracies in the 1960s. While in Italy the direct historical nexus has to be located in the Fascist expert knowledge, in the UK the same nexus is engrained in a governmental tradition of curbing social disorder in public space through devices of discipline and control. Alongside these we should be aware of national historical legacies; the deeper ideological legacies behind camp policies, we have argued, are not to be found ‘at home’, but ‘overseas’, in those colonial cities and lands where experiments of the first forms of the governance of social heterogeneity took place.

European states seem to largely avoid a public, open and political reflection on their colonial past. The various durable camps and camp formations that this Theme Special Feature discusses with insight find in colonial experiments of population governance a common ground (see Picker and Pasquetti 2015). For this reason, we encourage in-depth and comparative analyses of ‘Gypsy camp’ formations in other countries such as France, Greece and the Netherlands, as well as analyses connecting this type of camps with other devices of constriction, encapsulation and seclusion within and outside urban contexts, across the globe.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Silvia Pasquetti for enlightening discussions on issues relating to the article and for her insightful comments on a previous version.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

1 In the UK, Gypsies, Travellers and Roma (GTR) is the preferred designation utilized by the communities and recognizing the history of migration to the UK by the order in which named. Also, in Italy the preferred designation is rom e sinti, or rom, sinti e camminanti. For the sake of readability we deploy RGT.

2 The only exception is Picker ([2012](#)), who carried out a comparative genealogy of Italian and French camps for Roma.

3 In the UK context, the use of the term 'Romani' as a classificatory term for an ethnic group is not used consistently, largely gaining credence in the 20th century as part of a wider socio-political drive which at times is used to highlight a hierarchy of 'authenticity' in which Romani people are identified as 'pure-blooded' (see further this section of the paper) whilst simultaneously recognizing the diverse origins of travelling people in the UK and the relationship between 'Gypsies' and Roma populations when contrasted to other nomadic and formerly nomadic groups. Public policy documents still overwhelmingly refer to 'Gypsies', which for many British Romani people is their preferred identificatory term.

4 Here it is important to underline the connection between the Gypsy Lore Society and the Gypsy Studies Centre (and by extension Nomad Work) in that these and similar institutions across Europe were constructing a common expert knowledge about nomadism and Gypsies organizing international conferences, workshops and publications which have substantially shaped policymaking vis-à-vis RGT until today.

References

- 1. Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- 2. Agamben, Giorgio. 2007. *Metropolis* (November 16, 2006 lecture delivered at Uni Nomade). Translated by Arianna Bove. <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/giorgio-agamben/articles/metropolis/>
- 3. Agier, Michel. 2002. "Still Stuck Between War and City: A Response to Bauman and Malkki." *Ethnography*, no. 3: 361–366. doi: 10.1177/146613802401092805 [CrossRef], [CSA]
- 4. Australian Institute of Health & Welfare. 2009. *Measuring the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*. Canberra: AIHW.
- 5. Bauman, Zygmunt. 2002. "In the Lowly Nowherewilles of Liquid Modernity: Comments on and around Agier." *Ethnography* 3 (3): 343–349.
- 6. Belton, Brian. 2005. *Gypsy and Traveller Ethnicity: The Social Generation of an Ethnic Phenomenon*. London: Routledge. [CrossRef]

- 7. Bravi, Luca. 2009. *Tra inclusion ed esclusione. Una storia sociale dei rom e dei sinti*. Milan: Unicopli.
- 8. Burnett, John. 1986. *A Social History of Housing 1918–1985*. 2nd ed. London: Methuen.
- 9. Clough Marinaro, Isabella. 2009. "Between Surveillance and Exile: Biopolitics and the Roma in Italy." *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 1 (2): 265–287.
- 10. Comaroff, John. 1998. "Reflections on the Colonial State, in South Africa and Elsewhere: Factions, Fragments, Facts and Fictions." *Social Identities* 4 (3): 321–361. doi: 10.1080/13504639851663 [Taylor & Francis Online], [CSA]
- 11. Dal Lago, Alessandro. 2009. *Non-persons. The Exclusion of Migrants in a Global Society*. Milan: Ipoc Press.
- 12. Daniele, Ulderico. 2010. "Censimenti e razzializzazione della differenza zingara nell'era della sicurezza." In *Relativamente: nuovi territori scientifici e prospettive antropologiche*, edited by Lombardi Satriani, 92–99. Rome: Armando.
- 13. Diken, Bulten, and Carsten Lausten Laustsen. 2006. "The Camp." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 88 (4): 443–452. doi: 10.1111/j.0435-3684.2006.00232.x [CrossRef], [Web of Science®]
- 14. Dodds, Norman N. 1966. *Gypsies, Didikois and Other Travellers*. London: Johnson Publications.
- 15. Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Paul Rabinow. 1982. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics Second Edition with an Afterword by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- 16. Ek, Richard. 2006. "Giorgio Agamben and the Spatialities of the Camp: An Introduction." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 88 (4): 363–386. doi: 10.1111/j.0435-3684.2006.00228.x [CrossRef], [Web of Science®]
- 17. ERRC (European Roma Rights Centre). 2000. *Campland. The Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy*. Budapest: ERRC.
- 18. Flores D'Arcais, Giuseppe. 1967. "Il problema degli zingari." *Lacio Drom – rivista bimestrale di studi zingari* 3 (1): 3–8.
- 19. Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin.
- 20. Foucault, Michel. 2003. 'Society Must Be Defended'. *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*. New York: Picador.
- 21. Gmelch, George, and Gmelch Sharon 1974. "The Itinerant Settlement Movement: Its Policies and Effects on Irish Travellers." *Studies* 68: 1–16.
- 22. Goldberg, David Theo. 1993. "Polluting the Body Politic." In *Racist Culture. Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, 185–205. Oxford, UK, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- 23. Goldberg, David Theo. 2002. *The Racial State*. Oxford, UK, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- 24. Hayes, Michael 2006. *Irish Travellers: Representations and Realities*. Dublin: Liffey Press.
- 25. Isin, Engin, and Rygiel, Kim. 2007. "Of Other Global Cities: Frontiers, Zones, Camps." In *Cities of the South: Citizenship and Exclusion in the 21st Century*, edited by Barbara Drieskens, Franck Mermier, and Heiko Wimmen, 170–209. London, UK: Saqi.
- 26. Karpati, Mirella. 1962. *Ròmano Them (Mondo zingaro)*. Trento: Suola Grafica Artigianelli.
- 27. Kofman, Eleonore, and Elizabeth LeBas, eds. 2003. *Writings on Cities: Henri Lefebvre*. Malden, MA, Carlton, Victoria: Blackwell.
- 28. Lombroso, Cesare. 1876. *L'uomo delinquente in rapporto all'antropologia, alla giurisprudenza ed alle discipline carcerarie*. Milan: Hoepli.
- 29. Lucassen, Leo. 2011. "Cities, States and Migration Control in Western Europe. Comparing then and now." In *Gated Communities? Regulating Migration in Early Modern Cities*, edited by Bert de Munck and Anne Winter, 217–240. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- 30. Malkki, Lisa. 2002. "News from Nowhere: Mass Displacement and Globalized 'Problems of Organization'." *Ethnography* 3 (3): 351–360.

- **31.** Mayall, David. 1995. *English Gypsies and State Policies*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.
- **32.** McVeigh, Robbie. 1997. "Theorising sedentarism: the roots of anti-nomadism." In *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity*, edited by T. Acton, 7–25. Hertford: University of Hertfordshire Press.
- **33.** Ministero dell'Interno. 2010. *Censimento dei campi nomadi*. http://www1.interno.gov.it/mininterno/site/it/sezioni/sala_stampa/speciali/censimento_nomadi/
- **34.** Nieuwenhuys, Constant. 1974. *New Babylon – A Nomadic City*. The Hague: Municipal Museum.
- **35.** Pasquetti, Silvia. 2015. "Negotiating Control: Camps, Cities and Political Life." *City* 19 (5), this TSF.
- **36.** Piasere, Leonardo. 2006. "Che cos'è un campo nomadi?" *Achab. Rivista di antropologia* 8: 8–16.
- **37.** Picker, Giovanni. 2011. "Welcome 'in'. Left-wing Tuscany and Romani Migrants (1988–2007)." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16 (5): 607–620. doi: 10.1080/1354571X.2011.622469 [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science®]
- **38.** Picker, Giovanni. 2012. "Territori postcoloniali ai limiti. I campi per rom in Italia e Francia tra doxa e storia." In *Lo spazio del rispetto*, edited by Maria Elena Galeotti and Emanuela Ceva, 96–121. Milan: Bruno Mondadori.
- **39.** Picker, Giovanni. 2013. "Sedentarization and 'The Right to Nomadism'. The Urban and Regional Fabric of Nomad Camps in Italy." *Zeitgeschichte* 40 (5): 276–286. [Web of Science®]
- **40.** Picker, Giovanni, and Silvia Pasquetti. 2015. "Durable Camps: The State, the Urban, the Everyday." *City* 19 (5), this TSF.
- **41.** Picker, Giovanni, and Gabriele Roccheggiani. 2014. "Abnormalising Minorities. The State and Expert Knowledge Addressing the Roma in Italy." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 21 (2): 185–201. doi: 10.1080/1070289X.2013.854719 [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science®]
- **42.** Powell, Ryan. 2007. "Civilising Offences and Ambivalence: The Case of British Gypsies." *People Place and Policy Online* 1 (3): 112–123. doi: 10.3351/ppp.0001.0003.0002 [CrossRef]
- **43.** Ramadan, Adam. 2013. "Spatialising the Refugee Camp." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38 (1): 65–77. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-5661.2012.00509.x [CrossRef], [Web of Science®]
- **44.** Redclift, Viktoria. 2013. *Statelessness and Citizenship: Camps and the Creation of Political Space*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- **45.** Roccheggiani, Gabriele. 2013. *Come spighe tra granaio e campo. Lineamenti filosofico-politici della "questione rom" in Italia*. Fano: Aras Edizioni.
- **46.** Saitta, Pietro. 2008. "Immigrant Roma in Sicily: The Role of the Informal Economy in Producing Social Advancement." *Social Science Research Network*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1322153>
- **47.** Sanyal, Romola. 2012. "Refugees and the City: An Urban Discussion." *Geography Compass* 6 (11): 633–644.
- **48.** Semizzi, Renato. 1939. "Gli zingari." *Rassegna di clinica, terapia e scienze affini* 38 (1): 64–79.
- **49.** Shenhav, Yehouda. 2012. "Imperialism, Exceptionalism and the Contemporary World." In *Agamben and Colonialism*, edited by Svirski and Bignall, 17–31. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- **50.** Sibley, David. 1981. *Outsiders in Urban Societies*. New York: St Martins Press.
- **51.** Sibley, David. 1998. "The Racialization of Space in British Cities." *Sounding*, no. 10, Autumn: 119–127.

- **52.** Sigona, Nando. 2014. "Campzanship: Reimagining the Camp as a Social and Political Space." *Citizenship Studies* 19 (1): 1–15. doi: 10.1080/13621025.2014.937643 [[Taylor & Francis Online](#)], [[Web of Science](#)®]
- **53.** Smith, David, and Margaret Greenfields. 2013. *Gypsies and Travellers in Housing: The Decline of Nomadism*. Bristol: Policy Press. [[CrossRef](#)]
- **54.** Steinmetz, George. 2008. "The Colonial State as a Social Field: Ethnographic Capital and Native Policy in the German Overseas Empire before 1914." *American Sociological Review* 73: 589–612. doi: 10.1177/000312240807300404 [[CrossRef](#)], [[Web of Science](#)®]
- **55.** Stoler, Ann Laura. 1989. "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1): 134–161. doi: 10.1017/S0010417500015693 [[CrossRef](#)], [[Web of Science](#)®], [[CSA](#)]
- **56.** Svirsky, Marcelo, and Simone Bignall. 2012. *Agamben and Colonialism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- **57.** Swift, R., and S. Gilley. 1985. *The Irish in the Victorian City*. London: Croom Helm.
- **58.** Vassallo Paleologo, Fulvio. 2010. *Campi nomadi – Maroni e i sindaci contro il diritto dell'Unione Europea*. www.meltingpot.org
- **59.** Young, Jock. 1999. *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity*. London: Sage.