

# Dimensions of Antigypsyism in Europe

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# Racial Segregation: Camps for Roma and Slums in Italy

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## Introduction

This chapter explains why the camps for Roma and the slums where Roma live in Italy are places of racial segregation, marginalisation and stigmatisation. In the first part, the chapter traces a comprehensive history of the policies enabling the construction of camps from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. It then shows how the ideologies underpinning those policies informed subsequent decisions and strategies in governing camps for Roma until the late 2010s. In the second part, the analysis focuses on contemporary experiences of Romani people residing in camps – their constraints, desires and demands. In the conclusion, we outline some of the major problems behind camp governance and life today and suggest that, in order to stop racial segregation, anti-racism should become a key priority in political agendas at both grassroots and policy levels.

*Campland: Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy* is a research report published by the European Roma Rights Centre in 2000 (ERRC, 2000) and focusing on the situation of Roma living in camps in Italy. Four years earlier the first book in Italian on the same topic was published – *The Urban Planning of Dismay: Nomad Camps and Italian Society (L'urbanistica del disprezzo: Campi nomadi e società italiana, 1996)*. Hence, by the early 2000s the situation was known to both Italian and international publics. The segregation of Roma in Italian cities was a systemic and racial issue, evident in the presence of camps, namely policy-driven housing infrastructures in which only Roma families lived, typically fenced and located at the extreme peripheries of large and mid-size towns, disconnected from the public transport system, dilapidated and with highly precarious living conditions.

In its 2017 annual report, the NGO *Associazione 21 Luglio* (2017) estimated that about 26,000 of the *circa* 150,000 Roma and Sinti living in Italy reside in camps and slums across the country; of them,

16,400 live in formal or “authorised” camps, while the rest live in informal and improvised slums. Slums are usually abandoned areas equipped with shacks, at times with caravans, and generally without running water, heating and sewerage systems. Formal camps can be made illegal and consequently abandoned by local authorities and civil society groups, thus leading to a worsening of living conditions. About 43% of formal camp residents hold Italian citizenship, while almost all Roma living in slums are from Romania (about 86%) and Bulgaria; the life expectancy of the residents of both camps and slums is on average ten years less than the Italian population living outside the camps.

### **Racial Segregation as Structure: Genesis and Persistence of the Camps (1970s-2010s)**

In the aftermath of World War II, Italian Romani and Sinti families could enjoy regional and inter-regional mobility, which was the condition for carrying out some of their occupations such as craftsmen, horse traders and merry-go-round operators. The first informally organised settlements in which basic services including education and healthcare were provided emerged between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, on the outskirts of a number of Italian cities; services were typically offered by local NGOs and Catholic groups. It is important to mention that in 1969 the Council of Europe issued a recommendation (563/1969) urging Member States to construct “for Gypsies and other travellers [...] caravan sites [...] with sanitary installations, electricity, telephones, community buildings and fire precautions, as well as working areas, and should be situated near to schools and villages or towns” (Council of Europe, 1969).

By the early 1970s, in Italy and across Western Europe, demand for itinerant jobs started to decline, largely due to the gradual termination of a three-decade long high economic growth, and a slow move towards reducing social provisions of the welfare state became coupled with increasing police control of non-sedentary life. While differing across regions and cities, this phenomenon severely affected people living in caravans, i.e. first and foremost Roma and Sinti. Another coinciding and significant phenomenon was the arrival of adult Romani men from Yugoslavia from the mid-1960s onwards, later joined by their families, after Tito, then President of Yugoslavia, lifted emigration restrictions.

In this context of tightened socio-spatial control, increased urban policing, and diversification of the demographic profile of mobile populations, the informally organised settlements of Roma and Sinti that appeared in the early 1970s became institutionalised by the early 1980s. The first of these institutionalised camps was the “Sangone camp”, opened in 1979 near Turin, and named after the river where Sinti families used to stop and let horses drink. The official rationale for setting up the Sangone camp is fundamental, because it introduced a normative practice, among decision makers and local authorities, of building camps exclusively for Romani people. The rationale behind the construction of the camp was two-fold. On one hand, it aimed to insure the possibility for Roma to carry on their “nomadism” and keep travelling across the country; on the other, it aimed to offer a place where Romani people could stop during their itinerant life and have access to some basic services, including primary education for children.

The Sangone camp also illustrates another fundamental element, which has been present in all subsequent decisions about camps for Roma across the country: local authorities’ and NGOs’ dominant representation of Roma and Sinti. This representation was only about “nomadism”, meaning that Roma and Sinti were considered to be “nomads” above any other possible characterisation such as “workers”, “families”, “socially marginalised”, “Italians”, “foreigners”, etc. Nomadism, however, was not simply regarded as a lifestyle. Rather, it was considered to be a hereditary and psychosocial trait that all Roma allegedly bore: a socially deviant trait which inexorably triggered unpredictable behaviour outside the usual social and legal norms. This characterisation of Roma was sustained not only by policy makers and NGO activists, but also by very influential scholars in the fields of education and psychology.<sup>1</sup>

It is fundamental to understand this particular representation of Roma in the context of the first camp policies, and the reason for

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1 A significant number of academic works have recently shown that during the 1960s and 1970s expert knowledge, including academic knowledge, characterised Roma as intrinsically (i.e. psychologically and/or morally) deviant or potentially deviant. This characterisation influenced policy making, especially policies concerning camps. See for example Bravi, 2009; Picker and Roccheggiani, 2014. This did not only happen in Italy, but also in the United Kingdom: see for example Picker et al, 2015; Acton, 2016.

this is threefold. First, this representation influenced subsequent policies for Roma to this day and is likely to continue to do so. Second, without this representation, it would be hard to imagine fenced camps in urban peripheries as housing solutions – only once the problem had been defined in terms of an allegedly innate and potentially deviant trait, could camps be seen as adequate housing solutions. Third, the assumption of nomadism as a psychosocial trait unequivocally precluded the option of engaging in constructive and sustained dialogues with Romani families about their needs and desires for prospective housing solutions. Indeed, camps for Roma have been conceived as axiomatically proper by exclusively consulting with non-Roma “experts”, without involving those directly affected by camp policies in the decision making process.

By drawing on this dominant representation of Roma as “nomads”, from 1984 to 1992, 12 Regional Councils (out of a total of 21) passed as many laws ordering the construction of camps as the only housing solution for Romani families living in caravans and in other temporary accommodation. The 12 regions were those in which itinerant housing was considered to be a public order issue, as well as an issue of social exclusion, and both issues were to be tackled by a combination of caring and repressive policies. These 12 laws, or subsequent elaborations of them, are still in force, and they strictly resemble one another, both in terms of objectives and measures.<sup>2</sup> In the name of an ambivalent “right to nomadism”, the Regional laws ordered the construction of camps for both “sedentary” and “itinerant” “nomads”; they foresaw camps as temporary housing solutions, in view of a future and permanent sedentary way of life and inclusion in the mainstream society.

Such an ambivalent twofold rationale, i.e. “the right to nomadism” and “sedentarisation”, became the condition for camps to slowly permute from temporary housing solutions to permanent, overcrowded, unhygienic, and ultimately marginalised and segregated urban areas. Indeed, while on average, material and hygiene conditions inside the camps during the late 1980s and early 1990s were

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<sup>2</sup> Sigona (2011) has empirically demonstrated this fact, and explained the relations between public discourse, policy and institutional practices vis-à-vis Roma in Italy from the 1980s to the 2000s.

bearable, after the beginning of the Bosnian war in 1992, and later the Kosovo war in 1997-2000, the number of people, including Romani families, fleeing war and seeking refuge in Italy increased exponentially. This directly led to an increase in the camp population, leading to worse hygiene conditions, more precariousness and an increase in internal conflicts inside camps, as well as more repressive institutional measures.

This was indeed the situation that European Roma Rights Centre researchers witnessed in the late 1990s:

Roma live segregated from non-Romani Italians. [...] They can be evicted at any moment, and frequently are. A racist society pushes these Roma to the margins and hinders their integration. [...]. Where Italian authorities have expended energy and resources on Roma, these efforts have in most cases not been aimed at integrating Roma into Italian society. Quite the opposite: as the third millennium dawns, Italy is the only country in Europe to boast a systematic, publicly organised and sponsored network of ghettos aimed at depriving Roma of full participation in, or even contact or interaction with, Italian life. These Roma, in Italian parlance, live in "camps" or squalid ghettos that are "authorised" (ERRC, 2000).

It can be said that the expression "racial" in the ERRC's research report's title – *Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy* – is related to the fact that the institutional camp system, so meticulously engineered, was ultimately predicated on a racial designation of Roma as subjects characterised by a hereditary psychosocial abnormality, that is, nomadism. This is to say that rather than an "ethnic" or "cultural" peculiarity, nomadism was being considered by decision makers as a fundamentally racial characterisation. Fundamentally, such a dominant characterisation still persists.<sup>3</sup>

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3 As Picker (2017) has empirically shown, the racial characterisation of Roma as intrinsically "nomad" – and, as such, "deviant" – is still widespread and very pervasive among local authorities in Florence, Turin and Pescara in the 2010s, and such a significant characterisation translates at times in institutional decisions and practices predicated upon racism and bearing racially exclusionary effects. The second part of this chapter empirically accounts for the effects of this (mis)representation on the lives of Roma living in camps.

Concomitantly, since the late 1990s the national political landscape underwent a series of fundamental transformations, including an increased consensus for conservative and populist sentiments, especially following Berlusconi's 1994 Premiership and his coalition government that included the former fascist party, *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN), and the xenophobic and secessionist *Lega Nord* (LN). In 2002 the leaders of LN and AN, Bossi and Fini respectively, signed a new immigration law, which for the first time criminalised undocumented migration. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was at this point that camps for Roma and slums where Roma were living became criminalised in political discourses – first only locally, later also nationally – as emblems of social deviance and moral decay, for the purpose of legitimising repressive governance measures.

From the late 2000s to the late 2010s criminalisation grew steadily, and in order to understand how nomad camps were governed in this period, it is important to consider a number of key events. While inflammatory political discourses against Roma had been circulating since 1945, the first time that slums where Roma lived were mentioned in a political programme at the national level was in early 2008, one year after the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union. *La Casa delle Libertà*, the party headed by Berlusconi, who back then declared "zero tolerance" for Roma, illegal immigrants and criminals, included in its programme "[...] the fight against illegal settlements and the eviction of whoever does not have adequate means of subsistence and the right to reside in the country". This claim gained strong support due to its implicit reference to what happened in Rome a few months earlier.

In winter 2007 Ms Reggiani, the wife of a Military Navy Officer, was attacked and her bag stolen in the outskirts of Rome. As a consequence of the attack, the woman died. The only suspect was Mr Mailat, a Romanian man who was said to be living in a makeshift settlement not far from the location where the woman was attacked. As national headlines on the event broke out, the left-wing Mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni, announced his plan to deport Romanian citizens back to their country, in clear breach of EU freedom of movement legislation. Moreover, in the aftermath of what the media called "the Mailat case", Roberto Maroni (*Lega Nord*), the



just-elected Minister of Interior, signed a decree establishing “a state of emergency in relation to the settlement of nomads” and ordering the collection of fingerprints in all “nomad camps”, in order to create a record of camp residents.<sup>4</sup> Disregarding the subsequent European Parliament resolution (2008) stating that “collecting fingerprints of Roma [...] would clearly constitute an act of direct discrimination based on race and ethnic group”, Maroni did not stop the fingerprinting. Antigypsyism also took hold among citizens, and in May 2008 a mob set a camp on fire in Ponticelli, a suburb of Naples (La Repubblica, 2008).<sup>5</sup>

In this context, it was no surprise to read the 2008 UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) report on the situation of Roma in Italy:

The Committee [...] recommends that the State party develop and implement policies and projects aimed at avoiding segregation of Roma communities in housing, to involve Roma communities and associations as partners together with other persons in housing project construction, rehabilitation and maintenance. The Committee further recommends that it act firmly against local measures denying residence to Roma and the unlawful expulsion of Roma, and *to refrain from placing Roma in camps* outside populated areas that are isolated and without access to health care and other basic facilities. [...] The Committee, while noting the initiatives adopted by the State party to combat racial discrimination and intolerance, is concerned about reported instances of hate speech, including statements targeting foreign nationals and Roma, attributed to politicians (CERD, 2008).

During the 2010s the governance of camps largely followed the antigypsyist trend of the late 2000s. However, until the call for a Roma census by deputy Prime Minister Salvini in summer 2018, political antigypsyism largely remained at the municipal level. The 2009

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4 In his research in Rome, Daniele (2010) has provided solid evidence that shows that the government decision to collect fingerprints in “nomad camps” was a racist policy. For an overview of the fingerprinting policy, see Report on Marco Cappato and Viktoria Mohacsi's visit and meetings in Rome, 17-18 July, 2008, available at: <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2008/jul/italy-roma-meps-report.pdf>.

5 Sigona (2002) documented a similar attack on Roma in Scampia (Naples), which occurred in 1999.

“nomad plan” in Rome, for example, a municipal policy, which was promoted within the framework of the national “state of emergency”, fostered segregation by institutionalising existing camps and constructing new camps under high surveillance. Also, in 2015 a massive eviction of 26 Romani families happened in Turin and brought the European Court of Human Rights to order an end to the evictions. In Milan, 214 evictions of Romani people were carried out in 2010 alone, provoking the displacement of thousands of families, and the relocation of a number of them in institutionalised camps for Roma, some of which subsequently closed down without providing alternative and adequate housing to the evicted families.

In conclusion, we can say that since their institutional creation in the late 1970s, camps for Roma in Italy have shared and continue to share the following key features:

- They are the results of specific public policies;
- Their rationale combines social inclusion and allowing mobility;
- They were planned (in the 1980s and 1990s) and are still legitimised by drawing on a racist representation of Roma as mainly characterised by an alleged “nomadism”, largely intended as a racial trait leading to deviancy;
- They are typically in the periphery of large and mid-size towns, equipped with dilapidated housing, with sub-standard conditions, and badly connected to the city centre by public transport;
- They are usually governed with a combination of repressive (police) and social inclusion (social services) measures;
- Since the mid-2000s, local and national political authorities have increasingly criminalised them.

### **Experiencing Racial Segregation: Camp Residents’ Thoughts and Feelings**

The second part of this chapter is based on records provided by Romani people who wanted to share their personal experiences as residents of “nomad camps” in the city of Naples.<sup>6</sup> In particular, research participants from former Yugoslavian communities

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<sup>6</sup> Elisabetta Vivaldi has gathered data mentioned in this part during her doctoral research at Buckinghamshire New University-Coventry University. See Vivaldi, 2017.

expressed concerns about the negative impact on their personal “health and well-being” of living in Italian camps.

Most of the participants, born in former Yugoslavia (particularly but not exclusively Serbia), affirmed that although they are Roma, and thus equated in public and policy discourse with narratives of “nomadism”, their daily reality and former lives have no direct connection to “nomadism”. Both older generations (born in former Yugoslavia) and younger individuals (born in Italy or other EU Member States) affirmed that their families travelled mostly for leisure or seasonal work but they had no direct remembrance of “being nomads”. They also said they were aware that Italians often call them “nomads” but underlined that in Romani language they call themselves “Roma”.

Romani youths, born during or after the collapse of former Yugoslavia, explained that their most significant “travelling” move was their first migration trip, the one that they embarked upon to flee to Italy from conflict areas in their homeland. Some individuals declared they were born in Italy and have rarely travelled abroad or within Italy, due either to lack of proper personal documentation allowing for international mobility or to scarce financial resources. Other youths acknowledged that they knew the geography of the neighbourhoods situated near the camp very well, but they never (or rarely) had a chance to leave the camp and to experience life “outside”, as they were born “in camps”.<sup>7</sup> However, the majority of them wished for “a better future and a happy life” (see also Barsony, 2009).

Adults’ stories often started with an explanation of the reasons behind attempting a relocation abroad, accompanied by vivid descriptions, not only of war related memories, but also of the traumatic “arrival” in the Italian “nomad camps”. Romani “asylum seekers”, who escaped from conflict zones in former Yugoslavia, described their first memories with words of profound disappointment and frustration.

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7 The participants in the research were born in local hospitals, but in their discourses they use the nomad camp as a reference point to position who or what is “in”/“inside” and what is “out”/“outside” the settlement, in view of a personal perception of a social separation determined by the location.

A mother, who fled with her children to join her husband and avoid the 1999 bombings in Serbia, explained her sense of disenchantment when she realised that her relocation place was an illegal settlement, where there was no humanitarian aid (see also Vivaldi, 2014):

When I arrived, I came directly here; I did not even have a bedsheet. I asked what is this? Not even electricity, I was without electricity there [in war-zone] for three years and here too! What is this?! Here, not only did I not have electricity, but also nothing to cover myself. Nothing at all!

Sead Dobreva, a trade unionist, who was a war child refugee of Romani heritage from Kosovo who resettled in Scampia, a municipality of Naples, where his family once lived, shared an important childhood memory during an interview. His story gives an idea of the impact that living in the nomad camp had on him, and probably also on many children and adolescents, who were extremely vulnerable and totally unfamiliar with this new reality and the harsh living conditions:

I was happy [to escape], I believed that all would have been beautiful in Italy, but when I arrived in Scampia I saw the Roma camp and I started crying. Only thanks to my auntie who was already there in that camp [living] in a trailer, I found a way to distract myself because she gave me a remote-controlled car.<sup>8</sup>

Participants clarified that they all came from a “settled” background, often but not exclusively, from rural areas of former Yugoslavia. In particular, an elderly lady said:

We are not Čergari (Čerga means “tent” in Serbian)...We do not pitch tents [...] I was born in Yugoslavia when it was still a big country, in Šabac, Serbia... quite a big town, a mixed city, where Roma and other Yugoslavs lived together. It was an industrial town...where there were “the poor” and “the capitalists”... My family was rich, they were selling in the markets, travelling and trading everything: pots, pigs, plastic goods, curtains. They used to travel all over Yugoslavia

8 Dobrev, escaping from Kosovo, in Clemente 2015.

to sell, but mainly in Bosnia and Dalmatia. They used to put the pigs on the trucks to transport them, but before they used wagons or carts.

As described by several inhabitants who were used to living in proper housing before their relocation in a “nomad camp”, this change of lifestyle caused a sense of constant disorder and disorganisation. This perception may result from the physical environment of the settlement and correlated difficulty of managing the living space (see also Albert, 2012) but also the isolation, intended both as a geographic distance and a separation from mainstream society.

Inhabitants shared their feeling of instability and anxiousness linked to the impossibility to plan their future, while waiting for pending documents and surviving only with an intermittent income, often insufficient to fulfill the daily needs of an entire family.

One example of having to change their lifestyle to “adapt” is provided by Gloria’s story. Gloria is a Bulgarian Romani woman who migrated to Italy for economic reasons and only later married, according to customary law, a former Yugoslavian Rom who was already in the camp. Gloria, who had a high school degree, was in her twenties when she arrived in Italy. She dropped out of a course to become a Romani pupils school assistant to follow her siblings who were already living and working in Naples, one as a carer and the other as a carpenter. The reason she gave is that the financial support to study outside her village was not sufficient and she could not convince her family to invest in her education and professional training, so she gave up her aspiration to move abroad.

Gloria also criticised the camp and defined it as “an ambition killer where you rarely get a chance to emerge”. She explained that she came from a Bulgarian village where her parents lived in a cottage. At home, she “had everything” but she “had to leave everything behind” and learn “to adapt”. In Bulgaria she had running water, electricity, a stove and an oven to cook food, and a proper bathroom. In the nomad camp *everything* was “intermittent”: the water was not clean and drinkable, the bathroom was arranged as a “hole” in the ground, she had to heat the water on a handmade stove-burner before having a bath but before that she had to collect and cut wood. All these

activities were physically exhausting. Furthermore, as the electric voltage was so slow, appliances worked only intermittently, making the use of the washing machine rather difficult. In addition, there was no proper place to hang clothes, because the burner was incinerating all sorts of materials, included varnished wood and emitting fumes, while outside dust and particles were thrown up by passing cars in the proximity of the shack, or from vehicles passing overhead on a flyover. Similar problems arose with fridges and freezers because intermittent voltage increased food preservation risks.

Gloria explained that she did not expect to end up in a nomad camp: “I can’t say that I feel well here but I got used to it”. She was aware of being a European Union citizen, with the rights and duties of EU nationals: “I am only waiting to be given a chance to achieve a better life for me and my family” but she underlined that “it is more difficult if you live in a nomad camp, because potential employers are biased and discouraged to hire someone from such an environment”. Furthermore, her economic resources were very limited and insufficient to pay rent and utility bills, every month, without a permanent stable job in order to exit the camp. “You need economic power to attempt a family relocation and to take both husband and child, on my shoulder... Who will rent a house to a Romani family, foreigners and broke?”.

In sum, according to several respondents, living in nomad camps (either illegal or official) has an impact on individuals’ well-being, arising from having to get used to a lifestyle based on “coping” with different degrees of “deprivation”, but also having to adjust in order to tackle unpleasant situations, risks and instances of direct and indirect discrimination that Romani people had to learn to deal with, to get used to “camp life”. Coping mechanisms and resilience to overcome challenges included handling feelings associated with remaining in a long-term situation of deprivation of basic services and tolerating the frustration provoked by spatial segregation and discrimination.

Inhabitants not only lack facilities to maintain and take care of their items (as Gloria mentioned) but they also live with the instability, the constant fear of imminent changes, determined by eviction

orders. This results in being obliged to be constantly vigilant and, at the same time, being reluctant to invest money in resources and possessions that cannot be easily relocated from one place to another.

You must be more effective in how you handle your moves... You must understand that accumulating material objects will only stress you out when you will have to relocate, because you will have to leave things behind... The most fundamental things you carry with you are... essential to meet your daily needs. What you really need is the support of people who can help you with that, such as your family. All the rest is unnecessary and replaceable, so learn to cope without it.

Camp residents complained not only about the original allocation in the nomad camp, as an under-serviced space, but also about the lack of improvements during the decades that followed the arrival of Romani families from former Yugoslavia. Several participants in the research mentioned the fingerprinting operation carried out in 2008 during the declared “state of emergency in relation to the settlement of nomads” – mentioned in the first part of this chapter. They explained that they agreed to be fingerprinted in the hope of regularising their documents and of accessing services and “privileges” such as housing. Their intention was to reduce the gap between them (including the new generation born in Italy) and the “outsiders” (the non-Roma living outside the camp) by accessing services that were generally available only through the support of NGOs that often act as mediators and guarantors between service providers and semi-documented local community members. As reported by the Romani writer Ronald Lee (Montesi 2002) after a visit to the Casilino 900 camp in Rome in the late 1990s, Roma are forced to live in “Kalisferia”, a sort of “limbo” where they are left in alienation by the institutions. This description does not differ from the ones provided by the Roma in Naples two decades later.

As shown in the following testimony by a stateless (*de facto*) woman collected a few years after the fingerprinting took place, the camp conditions remained similar or even worsened:

Nothing related to living conditions got better [since the fingerprint collection], even more dirtiness – and now they even placed a rubbish plant in the middle of the *Gypsies [Zingari]*. They will make us die and our children too...They never cleaned up, even though we have been living here for twenty years and they did not clean because they do not want to say that we are clean...They throw the rubbish near us and then accuse us of being the ones that scatter it all over, but this is not true. No. These big black plastic bags are not thrown by us. They [i.e. the non-residents who fly-tip] come at 4.00 am, at 5.00 am, discharge their trash here and blame it on us.

Romani community members of all ages provided numerous heartfelt testimonies about racist incidents and bullying which occurred outside the camp, by both individuals and even institutional representatives (e.g. when accessing services).

### **Conclusion: Evicting Racism – How?**

In its 2009 research report on the housing of Roma in Italy, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency observed that:

There is a widespread conviction in Italy that Roma, Sinti and Travellers are nomadic populations whose cultures revolve around a nomadic lifestyle. This perception of the Roma as ‘nomads’ permeates all aspects of public policy towards these groups and in particular, housing policies. At the centre of housing policies targeting the Roma is the idea and practice of ‘camps for nomads’ or simply, Roma camps. These camps are frequently located far away from city centres, often close to motorways, railways, or an industrial area not inhabited by non-Roma groups; in some cases, they are even found on former waste dump sites. They are policy-induced segregated structures, often overcrowded and lacking in services and basic infrastructure. Roma camps are often targets of social alarm and hostility from nearby residents, and the decision to locate one in a city’s district is quite often submerged in political controversy (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009: 4).

This set of observations is testimony to the persistence, from the 1960s to 2009, not only of the “nomad” stigma as such, but also of its prominence in driving contemporary policies for Roma in Italy



beyond camp policies. This chapter has explained why this stigma is a racial stigma and how its serious consequences – in particular, the existence of camps for Roma and slums – are currently being experienced by Roma people. The dominant experience of being a stigmatised population, largely marginalised and left in highly precarious living conditions seems to pervade many experiences of camp life.

This chapter has also explained that the conditions of racial segregation experienced by approximately 26,000 Roma in Italy are the direct consequence of public policies, and not – as it is often suggested – the choice of Roma. The exclusion of Roma people from decision making processes since the very beginning of camp policies has had the consequence of creating places of segregation that were initially driven by an ambivalent rationale consisting in, on the one hand, providing social inclusion, and, on the other hand, curbing social deviance tendencies.<sup>9</sup> This ambivalence was ingrained in the racial stigma of “nomadism”, which is still pervasive and carries with it the dominant idea that there is no need to get rid of racism, because the problem lies in Roma’s alleged characteristics, not in institutional approaches and assumptions shared by the majority society.

This chapter has shown that this history of shared assumptions and related policies is fundamental to understand where the problem lies and – therefore – how to tackle it. Racism is intrinsic to how Italian authorities, media and the general public have addressed the problem of “camps”; in other words, it is part of an established, dominant and pervasive tradition of policy making, whereby there would be nothing to gain in considering Roma more than de-personalised “nomads”, lumping them together irrespective of their own views, histories, claims and aspirations.

In order to address the racial segregation of Roma in Italian camps, therefore, we argue that anti-racism should be a priority in both policy and grassroots interventions. In particular, fighting

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9 Article 30 of the United Nations “General Recommendation No. 27: Discrimination against Roma”, signed in 2000, invites governments “to develop and implement policies and projects aimed at avoiding segregation of Roma communities in housing; to *involve Roma communities and associations* as partners together with other persons in housing project construction, rehabilitation and maintenance” (article 30; emphasis added).

antigypsyism – rooted as it is in the belief, borne out of Christian values and colonialism, that white Westerners are morally superior to Jews, Muslims, Blacks, Roma, and other discriminated groups – should become priority number one when it comes to thinking about possible solutions. Understanding antigypsyism as a set of opinions or prejudice confined to the mind of certain individuals or specific (so-called “extreme”) groups, as it often is, cannot serve as a valid starting point. Rather, antigypsyism, as this chapter has thoroughly demonstrated, is part of a structure, a long-term camp system that keeps thousands of families trapped in very degrading conditions, humiliating them by imposing a life on the outskirts of urban peripheries; an enduring camp system that was legitimised by notions of psychosocial abnormality and social deviance.

Therefore, in order to counter this system, in order to reverse the trend of segregation, antigypsyism needs to be challenged as a structure, not as a set of individual or group verbal/physical expressions. This may translate into initiatives that would promote knowledge about the deep-rooted racial stigmatisation of Roma, the production of their alleged abnormality and the consequences of this stigmatisation, including the camp system. Initiatives may also involve training for teachers, policemen, journalists, healthcare professionals and politicians not only about the deep-rooted and long history of antigypsyism in Italy, but also about the very nature of antigypsyism as a specific form of racism. In addition, and perhaps subsequently, any future housing projects should put the interests and needs of Romani families currently living in camps at the core of the decision making process.

All these initiatives will have no results unless they are supported by political will. Political parties, grassroots organisations, and interested citizens cannot ignore that antigypsyism, as much as racism in general, are profoundly political forces, which can only be challenged on political grounds. The fashionable technicalities of the social inclusion policy framework – not least across the various National Strategies for Roma Inclusion – are doomed to fail if they are not supported by political decisions, primarily by acknowledging and listening to Romani communities. Pushing an engaged anti-racist political agenda with and in support of Romani communities

is the only way to reverse the trend of racial segregation which has been ongoing for decades. Evicting racism from policy making, actions and cultural assumptions requires political interventions.

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