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Provincialising security: materiality and sensoriality

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ABSTRACT

Security has come to embody a self-evident and much sought-after kind of good, and has come to colonise imaginaries, debates, policies, and large swathes of what social life means in various corners of the world. Echoing postcolonial calls for decentring that which is taken for granted, my essay seeks to provincialise security in three distinct ways. Drawing on my research on the securitisation of the Roma in Italy, first, I trace the transformation of the term *sicurezza* from safety to security in a recent-historical perspective, showing how the notion morphed from bodily integrity to a much more blurred – though taken for granted – concept. Second, using a non-representational approach grounded in new materialism, I show that what hides beneath the ubiquitous talk of *sicurezza* surrounding the Roma nowadays are dimensions of materiality and sensoriality that construct insecurity in a relational and ever-shifting manner. Third, I privilege the perspective of the Roma in a decolonising move that questions their securitisation and the overall framing of Roma-related concerns as a security problem. Finally, I show the productivity of the topology framework in provincialising both security, and the western-centric theory production around it.

Introduction

Security takes a prominent space in contemporary discourses and practices. Terms like 'culture(s) of (in) security' have been used to define the contemporary vigilant Zeitgeist across several disciplines (Massumi 1993; Weldes et al. 1999; Daase 2011). The multiplication of security concerns gave impetus to the development of securitisation theory (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998). This representational theory, focusing on how security issues arise and dissolve by means of speech acts that define security threats, has proven extremely productive in critical security studies. While the shortcomings of securitisation theory have been broadly charted and gaps in the initial framework related to the effects of race or gender, for instance, have been pinpointed (Hansen 2000; Moffette and Vadasaria 2016), the theory's Eurocentrism is the object of growing scholarly criticism (Abboud et al. 2018). Other scholars (Aradau 2010; Walters 2014) have argued that the framework's discursive approach to how security issues are constructed ignores the fundamental dimension of materiality and its agentic qualities. Following this critique, I proposed a non-representational approach inspired by the Actor-Network Theory that embeds materiality into the way in which security issues are produced across chains of mediators like fences or video surveillance cameras (Ivasiuc 2019).

A topological approach that privileges a relational perspective on the ever-shifting ways in which security is produced, in all its ambivalences and contradictions, is not new in critical security studies. Didier Bigo (2001), for instance, treated external and internal security as a Möbius ribbon where surfaces and edges appear as multifold, but their apparent multiplicity folds into one another

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to create a continuum. Bigo called for greater analytic attention to liminal spaces: 'it is necessary to think about the boundaries of security. So, one needs to trace a new *topology* of security, new graphs and charts of the relationships between the different forms of security and insecurity' (93, emphasis in original). Since then, topology found a certain degree of popularity in social sciences, amounting to a potential 'topological turn' (Phillips 2013). Topology as method and as 'technique for abstraction' (Gros, Russell, and Stafford 2019) has been fruitfully applied through the juxtaposition of topological concepts like vectoring (Beigi 2019), crosscuts (Green 2019), surfacing (Gros 2019), and threshold (Kockelman 2019) to ethnographic material.

This essay applies topology thinking to my ethnographic material, and builds on previous work on how insecurity is produced through the agency of materiality, adding to that the dimension of sensoriality and exploring how sensorial registers and modes of perception contribute to (re) producing insecurity.[1] Secondly, I confront the production of insecurity by means of materiality and sensoriality with the perspective of the subjects of these securitisation practices, in my case inhabitants of *campi nomadi* in the peripheries of Rome.[2] By attending to how the Roma, as subjects of securitisation, understand and subvert their own securitisation themselves, I show how (in) security appears as a multifold object. I use productively the tension between topology/scene charted in the introduction to this special section (Dwyer et al., this issue) to show how insecurity, seen through a topological lens, acquires a multiplicity of dimensions that fold into one another continuously around the invariant criminalisation of the Roma, taken as recombinatory principle.

I first chart how the Italian vernacular *sicurezza* featured in political and societal debates in a recent-historical perspective, grasping the semantic transformation that took place roughly at the end of the 1980s. This is important to decentre contemporary understandings of security and grasp their transformations in the Italian context. In the second section, I use my ethnographic engagement with the formal and informal policing practices aimed at *campi nomadi* in the peripheries of Rome, which I conceptualise as security scenes. I build on insights from posthumanism and new materialism (Bennett 2010; Barad 2007), as well as on recent anthropological scholarship on the aesthetics of security (Ghertner, McFann, and Goldstein 2020) and its spatiality (Low and Maguire 2019), adding to the dimension of materiality that of sensoriality. In my third section, I lay out how the camp inhabitants respond to the ways in which they are securitised through material and sensorial registers, and show how their perspective deconstructs security in radical ways, dissolving it into wider issues of structural inequality in racial capitalism. Finally, I sketch briefly how the concepts of topology/scene are useful in conceptualising the contemporary production of insecurity around figures of the Other like the Roma.

Sicurezza: from safety to security

Scholarship on security has been criticised for its presentist approach (Dodsworth 2019). Examining how notions of (in)security morphed over time uncovers their present qualities and decentres our ways of understanding (in)security conceptually. Looking back in time at the transformations of security supports the epistemological goal of this section to critically question not only putative place (as in 'Western', broadly), but also time-bound conceptions of security.

In their collective work on decentring western perspectives on security, Abboud and colleagues (2018) highlight the arbitrary nature of using English language concepts in theorisation (see also Tulumello and Falanga 2015). The varying degrees of translatability of vernacular words complicate things further. Consider the Italian *sicurezza*, meaning both safety and security: making sense of which one people mean when they speak of *sicurezza* adds a layer of complexity. In my research, I followed back in time the thread of how *sicurezza* shifted in newspaper articles, particularly at the cusp of the 1980s and 1990s. While in the eighties, newspaper articles featuring *sicurezza* were few and far between, they referred exclusively to a notion of bodily integrity closer to safety than to security. Articles tackled *sicurezza* on three main sites of social and political debate: the safety belt, safety on construction sites and more broadly work-related safety, as well as air travel safety regulations. As safety, *sicurezza* was then closely linked with *salute* (health), with a notion of 'labour hygiene' (*igiene del lavoro*), and with the prevention of road, aviation, or

labour accidents.[3] Seemingly, then, *sicurezza* was a central notion within progressive politics that sought the protection of workers from death and illness. Safety, moreover, entailed a crucial dimension of accidentality pointing towards the unintended agency of material objects, or at the most human neglect, rather than towards the evil forms of human intentionality that the notion of insecurity evokes in our times.

At the end of the 1980s – beginning of the 1990s, Italy was the scene of resounding attacks by members of mafia organisations or political activists aiming at eliminating opponents by violent means. Articles also reported an 'epidemic' of drug-related crimes and deaths, particularly around the increasing trade and use of heroin. Although crime levels were higher than today, the notion of security did not permeate public debates in relation to these kinds of insecurities. Today, although crime levels have decreased in Italy since the beginning of the nineties (Tulumello 2017), concerns about security are omnipresent. This dynamic is global in scale (Bauman 2001), and scholars found similar trends in diverse contexts, including those known for high levels of violence, like Colombia (Zeidermann 2020), or South Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff 2016): as crime and violence levels decreased, insecurity concerns skyrocketed and increasingly colonised the everyday.

As security discourses proliferated in Western European societies, debates on *sicurezza* followed suit in Italy. In the nineties, alongside the emergence of political debates on immigration, urban security, micro-criminality, and blight (Battistelli 2013; Cole 1997; Dal Lago 1998; Maneri 2001; Quassoli 2004; Recasens et al. 2013), *sicurezza* started morphing from a notion of safety as bodily integrity and protection from accidental harm to a notion of security as collective concern of survival: a translation took place from the 'body physic' to the body politic at the same time as *sicurezza* started proliferating in debates linked to 'crimmigration' (Franko 2020) – the establishment of a powerful discursive-cum-legal link between crime and migration linked to the latter's securitisation. While until the 1990s Italy had been an emigration more than an immigration country (Cole 1997), immigration started taking off in numbers that provoked moral panics, fierce political debates, and attacks on migrants perpetrated by far-right groups – like the 1990 carnival raid in Florence. In parallel, other Western European countries were witnessing similar processes of the securitisation of migration and the emergence of a politics of security that was exclusionary and centred on the cultural, integralist preservation of reified nations (Holmes 2000; Huysmans 2006). At the same time, the emergence of urban security as a field of policy grounded security concerns in the materiality of the city more specifically.

The move of *sicurezza* from safety to security in Italy can be conceptualised as what Holger Stritzel (2011) calls 'security, the translation'. A translational understanding of security in this sense is 'historical, local, non-essentialist, empirical-reconstructive and reflectivist' (346), and it sets the first step in provincialising essentialist, universalist, a-historical, irreflexive, and all too abstract understandings of security. However, this conceptualisation remains too close to the representational approach to how security is constructed discursively, leaving aside crucial dimensions that contribute to the translation of security over time in particular iterations. I now turn to the dimensions of materiality and sensoriality that can illuminate how security is produced not only discursively, but also through practices embedded in sensorially apprehended material infrastructures which possess agentic qualities in themselves.

Materiality and sensoriality

Anthropological approaches to security have recently developed important conceptual tools to think of security as spatialised, materialised, and aestheticised, joining a growing corpus of scholarship in critical security studies that devoted attention to the entanglements of matter and materiality in the constitution of (in)security (Aradau 2010; Walters 2014; Aradau et al. 2015). The concept of 'securityscape', for instance, taken from Hugh Gusterson (2004), then Albro and colleagues (Albro et al. 2012) but further developed into a spatial concept by Setha Low and Mark Maguire (2019) renders the dynamic and co-constitutive agency of security imagination, affect, and materiality through which spatialised security practices are deployed. Such a relational rendering approximates

the topological approach that the initiators of this section propose to employ in order to grasp the multitude of ever-shifting dimensions and agents that constitute (in)security. In a recent volume on the aesthetics of security (Ghertner, McFann, and Goldstein 2020), the contributors explore through ethnographic accounts how a sensorial approach to security exposes it as a mode of power predicated on designing fortresses, screening threats, and calibrating vulnerabilities. Following the aesthetic interest of the volume in security-related processes, visuality figures (perhaps too) prominently, mirroring the 'ocularcentrism' of our society (Classen 1997). Other senses participate in constructions of (in)security, too. Sensorial perceptions, anthropologists pointed out, are not only socially and culturally shaped, but also taught, transmitted, negotiated, and disciplined. Rather than being universal or individual manifestations and reactions, sensorial perceptions are social and emplaced phenomena (Racleş and Ivasiuc 2019). Critical geographers have recently advanced a topological understanding of how power warps affect spatial practices and experiences through the concept of 'tactile topologies' (Dixon and Jones, 2015; Fraser, 2017), pointing towards the productivity of the haptic dimension in the conceptualisation of topologies of power. Yet these accounts still rely more on representational metaphors such as the 'reach', or the state's 'sensory nerves' than on a materially constituted sensorial register that connects human and non-human agencies.

A fruitful conceptual thread that ties together and complements these literatures is the approach taken by new materialism, where the boundary between the human and non-human is contested. In this approach, matter is agentive and complexly and inextricably interconnected with humans (Barad 2007; Bennett 2010). The boundaries between matter, humans, and non-humans are contested in a way that also contradicts representationalism, as well as the Cartesian duality between matter and mind: matter is not merely observed and represented by humans at the ideatic level; it has agency in itself, as matter. Matter is 'a doing' (Barad 2007, 151). This framing, bringing together the material and the human through the sensorial, provides a crucial counterpoint to poststructuralist approaches in critical security studies in which the constructivism/essentialism impasse leaves the question of the ontological qualities of (in)security unresolved. This section shows how materiality and sensoriality work relationally to produce shifting figurations of (in)security around *campi nomadi* and their racialised inhabitants in Rome.

The securitisation of the Roma in Europe proceeds along several predominant discursive and visual representations (van Baar, Ivasiuc, and Kreide 2019): as criminals, as risky – and at risk – migrants, as failed citizens undeserving of welfare (Vrăbiescu 2019), and as intruders in white, middle-class neighbourhoods. However, their discursive constitution as a threat is deeply grounded in – and shaped by – the material conditions that surround Roma settlements and their often subaltern (im)mobility, as well as in the materiality of their informal livelihoods. The speech acts that constitute Roma as threats proceed from these material conditions and their sensorial perception. Material infrastructures are inevitably enmeshed in the production of (in)security – a term by which I point at the Möbius strip-like relationality between security and insecurity (Bigo 2001), but also at how security is differently bestowed on and perceived by distinct groups according to their relative position in social hierarchies: what for some – typically more privileged – constitutes security, is for subaltern others insecurity. A case in point for this relational approach is the segregation of Roma in camps far removed from residential areas in Italy: while the Roma are kept out of the sight of Italians, for the camp inhabitants themselves this entails not only the insecurity of their livelihoods, but also lack of safety in camps where fires erupt regularly due to the faulty infrastructure, where ambulance drivers are reluctant to drive, and where the script of DIY 'justice' against camp inhabitants materialised in more than one occasion in violent acts of arson (Rivera 2009).

Precarious Roma – about a quarter of all the Roma in Italy – live in what are commonly called *campi nomadi* – camps of varying sizes and legal statuses (authorised, tolerated, and illegal). The genealogy of camps has been traced back to colonial dispositifs of confinement (Picker 2012; Picker, Greenfields, and Smith 2015). Spatio-racial technologies of colonial governance, camps were

'imported' from colonial to metropolitan contexts after WWII, and institutionalised in Italy in the 1980s and 1990s as unique 'housing' solution for Roma wrongly considered nomadic. In topological thinking, the camp has been conceptualised as a threshold, as well as an indistinct zone of in/exclusion that behaves like a Möbius band (Martin and Secor 2014). In the case of the Roma in Italy, while camps were initially conceived as technologies of cultural protection of the Roma's putative nomadism, they have subsequently morphed into spaces where insecurity is produced in fractal ways. Yet at the same time, some of the Roma develop a sense of protection through anonymity in the space of the camp, and adapt to the resources that the camp offers; the workings of the camp on the political subjectivation of its inhabitants are ultimately also ambiguous (Sigona 2015).

Often placed near landfills, camps have, over time, cemented the association between Roma and notions of contamination and pollution (Piasere 1991). Camps are spaces of discard and disinvestment, far removed from residential areas and characterised by multifold and ambiguous service neglect: while social services are scarce, repressive measures are highly visible. Police reports betray a continuous concern with the strict maintenance of the boundary by repeated repairs of the breeches in the fences surrounding camps (Ivasiuc 2019). Municipal garbage collection, in turn, is irregular and neglectful. As a result, large quantities of waste regularly appear in the immediate surroundings of *campi nomadi*. The mountains of waste surrounding camps often burn slowly, releasing columns of pungent white, grey, or black smoke that raises up in the air of the Roman peripheries, becoming a hot topic of consternation in the traditional and social media. Smoke has agentive qualities: when observed in the skies of the peripheries, it often gives impetus to the formulation of collective complaints that demand from the authorities a more vehement security intervention in camps.

The burning of waste (*roghi tossici*) is attributed to the activity of metal extraction that some of the camp inhabitants practice as livelihood: the plastic components of cables or household appliances are melted to extract metals that are then resold to scrap dealers (*rottamatori*). For the police, *roghi tossici* are the greatest cause of concern in terms of security around *campi nomadi*. The (now former) commander of the local police in Rome explains:

> They burn the waste that they collect. You go to the mechanic, and he takes ten car batteries and he has to melt them according to the regulations for 100 euro, for example. But then comes the Roma guy with the van and proposes to melt ten batteries for 30 euro. . . . They collect copper wire, too, but the cables contain plastic, so the Roma burn everything to collect only the copper and they burn the plastic. . . . Copper goes to the scrap dealer. . . . They take refrigerators from the big supermarkets, which have pieces of copper that they dismantle and resell, then there's the engine that they send abroad maybe, and then they burn the carcasses to remove the white paint and they resell the metal for fifteen cents per kilogram. . . . This is the biggest social alarm in terms of security.[4]

While this is the predominant explanation, things are more complicated: sometimes camp inhabitants light up fires to burn the malodourous waste in the hot Roman summers; other times, bored and rebellious youth burn waste for fun; sometimes feuds between families in overcrowded camps lead to acts of vandalism involving arson; yet other times, they may appear as retaliation to acts of policing deemed unjust, like evictions or heavy-handed controls. As to why such large quantities of waste are continuously amassed around camps, investigative journalists (Belli et al. 2015) have revealed the role of waste mismanagement and the propensity of Romans – private individuals, as well as small companies – to discard waste near camps as a cost-reducing strategy, through which they avoid spending resources and time to process old furniture, house appliances, and construction debris through the legal paths.

The phenomenon of fires intensified after 2008. The Roman administration decided to evict camps situated within the city towards the peripheries, in what was called the 'degypsification' of Rome (Bermann and Clough Marinaro 2011). The Veltroni administration started the dismantlement of inner-city camps in 2007, but 2008 marked a clear intensification of evictions, facilitated by the regulations of the so-called '*emergenza nomadi*': the state of emergency declared in April 2008 by the newly elected Berlusconi government in response to episodes of moral panic (Ivasiuc 2021).

The state of emergency provided local administrations with power and the resources to take whatever measures they deemed fit to curb urban insecurity. Evictions of informal camps and the dismantlement of a few large authorised or tolerated camps and the relocation of their inhabitants to distant camps were framed as urban security measures. But the displacement of camp inhabitants towards the peripheries also meant their uprooting from the social and economic networks that they had long forged in the city. Bereft of their previous livelihoods, camp inhabitants had to turn to other means, and scrap metal trade proved to be a reasonable alternative due to the global rise in metal prices that Chinese demand spurred in the 2000s (Olivera 2015). Moreover, due to the displacement of Roma, the authorised camps in the peripheries quickly became overcrowded, which intensified conflicts between families and put constraints on the space available for scrap metal storage. Whereas previously families were using the internal space near their inhabitable containers to store scrap metal until the quantities were large enough to justify a transport to the *rottamatori*, this was disallowed once the camps became overcrowded, and families started storing their material outside the camp. The appearance of heaps of what seemed like waste (but was not) encouraged Italians to also discard cumbersome objects near camps. Those who knew camp inhabitants personally would also call them to remove old furniture and house appliances for a small fee.

In 2010, the Alemanno administration set up a special police unit. Initially called *Operative coordinating unit for nomads settlements*, the unit was tasked with monitoring the authorised *campi nomadi* and with executing the eviction of illicit camps. Its name changed later to Public and Emergency-related Security unit (*Gruppo Sicurezza Pubblica Emergenziale*, henceforth, SPE), masking the initial intent of targeted policing of the precarious Roma living in camps. In 2014, to combat the fires, the administration decided to post security guards inside camps, to instal surveillance cameras along the fences of several of the authorised *campi nomadi*. According to police reports, however, the cameras often did not work, and functioned hence more as a performance of security than a preventive measure. Also, the municipality tasked the SPE with 24 h patrolling around the camps. This, however, did not put a halt to the fires, and residents neighbouring *campi nomadi* started to demand repeatedly no less than the army's intervention, calling the camps a 'zone of war', and the smoke from fires 'chemical warfare'. The multiplication and intensification of security measures around *campi nomadi* culminated, in 2019, with the posting of military personnel in two *campi nomadi* over the duration of a few months.

These developments show the importance of taking into account the materiality of those processes, places, or groups constituted as security threats. They also point to the connection between materiality and sensoriality beyond the mere visual: the smoke arising from the heaps of waste amassed near camps, often referred to as *puzza* (stench), is understood to be composed of molecules of dioxin harmful to human health:

> Blight and waste illegally disposed of, born around their 'residential' hangout places, veritable infectious bombs from a hygiene and sanitary point of view, given that they live in this infinite filth, among rats and carcasses of dead animals, open-air sewers, putrid and highly toxic waste (. . .) The issue now is really to start protecting our own health and that of our children, surely already compromised in many of us, given what they have been making us inhale for years now, pure dioxin.[5]

These discourses provoke episodes of alarm, indignation, and vigilante-like tendencies towards 'DIY justice' among the inhabitants of the peripheries of Rome:

> I don't know how this never-ending story will end up, but what burns on the embers is the tolerance of many towards the disrespectfulness of these delinquents who always act in impunity. But watch out, when honest exhausted people will no longer tolerate enduring this and will get out of control, it will be really hard to stop the riot when it spills in all its rage.[6]

Such posts on social media are agentic objects in themselves: they accrue insecurity for the Roma, while multiplying discourses of insecurity that further snowball among Italians, too. The references to dioxin, moreover, recall the ecologic disaster of Seveso, where one of the worst man-made industrial accidents took place in 1976 and exposed surrounding areas to the highest concentration

of dioxin known in history. The accident is deeply ingrained in the collective memory of Italians and known for the disastrous health effects on the surrounding population in Lombardy. References to dioxin, therefore, mobilise an entire imaginary around health hazards and ecological disaster, and reflect what Kolar Aparna and colleagues (Aparna, Hendrikx, and Lagendijk 2022, 4) call 'wheeling': a topological concept that describes 'the extraction of abstract content from concrete practices with the capacity to move to the next site'.

A topological conceptualisation shows how different kinds of insecurities morph into one another while keeping the Roma the constant subject of concern. The criminalisation of the Roma as thieves, producing the moral panic kind of insecurity that has spurred patrolling in the neighbourhood (Ivasiuc 2015), folds into their scapegoating as polluters producing and burning waste. The molecules of smoke reach the inhabitants' nostrils and lungs as a deadly 'chemical weapon' behind which the Roma, again, and the materials they burn to extract metal for their livelihoods, are identified as culprits.

This section laid out the ways in which the Roma are constantly (re)produced as threat through the agency of the sensorially apprehended camps materiality, showing how humans and materiality are the matter of securitisation in entanglements where the boundaries between matter and humans are blurred and effect co-constitutive 'intra-actions' (Barad 2007) that emerge from relationships. Waste and the smoke arising from its burning exhibit their 'thing-power' (Bennett 2010) to securitise camp inhabitants and their practices. They are not merely passive objects, or results of human agency; nor are they stable entities. They are agentic and associative, inasmuch as they congregate with human actors in dynamic assemblages across material and ideatic realms whose separation is hard to maintain, and in topological moves that link different sites and times.

Dissolving security, or how the Roma react to their securitisation

This section explores what the Roma themselves have to say – and what they do – about the ways in which they are apprehended as threats by means of the materiality and sensoriality of *campi nomadi*. This contributes to provincialising mainstream notions of security by critically reinscribing a securitised population within the structures of power and oppression that subalternise them. But this conceptual move does more than that. It questions whether the epistemological focus on the securitisation of subaltern Others does not, inadvertently, contribute to confining them conceptually to a position of objects of securitisation instead of potentially exploring them as subjects of (infra)political struggle and contestation.

The criminalisation of the Roma is met with a sharp critique by the camp inhabitants. Conscious of their subaltern position in socio-economic hierarchies, they couch petty theft as poverty crime, pointing instead towards the larger scales of crime that some Italians perpetrate. At the beginning of my fieldwork in Rome, the scandal that came to be known as Mafia Capitale revealed how staff of the Roman administration were involved in Mafia schemes through which money was made on the back of camp inhabitants and refugees. Exorbitant rents for social housing allocated to refugees, and administration, security, and waste clearance fees spent on *campi nomadi* were pocketed by shady organisations under the control of Massimo Carminati. In the decree that convicted the culprits, the word *nomadi* appears 165 times, describing in detail conversations between Carminati and various politicians or civil servants who had colluded with him for the preferential attribution of public procurement contracts encompassing everything from the management of camps and centres to infrastructure works, and to the provision of overpriced, low-quality meals in the reception centres for refugees. Staff from the *Ufficio Rom, Sinti e Camminanti* – people well known and rightly judged by many Roma as profiteers even before the eruption of the scandal – ended up convicted of corruption. A policeman formerly employed by the SPE was also investigated in the process. Comparing the proportions of theft

among destitute camp inhabitants and among the corrupt network revealed through Mafia Capitale, one of the Roma noted: 'We steal a piece of bread, they steal millions with their pen, just by putting their signature on papers'.[7]

The Roma response to the abjectification of their material living conditions and livelihoods is another critique addressed to the authorities. Conscious of the stereotypical portrayal of camp inhabitants as dirty, and of how non-Roma attribute the stench often surrounding *campi nomadi* to their inhabitants, the Roma point towards service neglect and their segregation in camps. The lack of hygiene, the bad smells, the rats are consequences of the lack of services, more so in the authorised camps under the authority of the administration than in the informal camps set up autonomously by Roma, where people usually organise themselves to keep the camp clean. By pointing to the neglectful services in authorised camps, the Roma deliver a critique of their segregation, and of the structural obstacles to exiting the camp: the impossibility of obtaining a mortgage for the purchase of a home, the difficulty to access social housing and the long waiting lists, the stigmatisation of camp inhabitants that makes it nearly impossible to rent a home.

By contesting their connection to insecurity in these terms, the Roma displace the concerns surrounding their presence towards the structural issues that affect the poorest of them. It is not that they are a security danger, and they refuse their subjectivation as such. They are relegated to a position of subalternity that threatens, by the very material and sensorial means of camp squalor, the sensibilities of the non-Roma. Their contestation dissolves security, placing instead at the centre of the debate the issues of inequality that stand at the root of the contemporary insecuritisation. Yet the critique of their own securitisation employs the materiality of the camp to demonstrate the neglect of the authorities and the dire material deprivation of camps. At the same time, they point towards their own insecuritisation, and the precarisation of their livelihoods as a result of repeated evictions:

> When we were in the city, we had enough to eat. We knew Italians, good Italians, women who would give us clothes for the children, money, food. Sometimes they asked us to come clean up their house or so, and gave us money for our work. It was good. Now that we're here in the camp, where can we get that from? I have to take the pram and walk on the road for miles and miles, there is no sidewalk, there was a woman a few years ago who got run over by a car. There is no bus. Look around. Rats everywhere, children get bitten by them, it's dangerous.[8]

> This place is not safe for us. There are fires because of the electric wires tied together, or the way that people make fire inside their containers to warm themselves up. It burns so easily, they don't even have time to get the children out and run. And the firemen always come late, when there's nothing more to save.[9]

The epistemological choice to prioritise Roma perspectives aims at decolonising predominant understandings of 'western', mainstream perceptions of security. I certainly do not suggest that the Roma are 'non-western' or non-European: that kind of racist and essentializing discourse is one of the strands contributing to constructing the Roma as non-belonging in Europe. It is not in virtue of an assumed non-Europeanness that the Roma are particularly apt in decentring, in a decolonial way, security. It is their protracted position of subalternity, similar to that of other migrant groups, refugees, or women (as in Hansen 2000), as well as their conception as not-quite-modern (Bhabha 1984) that allows them a viewpoint from which the contradictions and injustices of the system become fully apparent. Relegated to the 'racializing assemblages' (Weheliye 2014) that *campi nomadi* are, precarious Roma occupy a point of observation 'from below' that, if taken seriously, provincialises mainstream conceptions of security, pluralising and de-centring them (Abboud et al. 2018). At the same time, they highlight how social inequality is really at the core of the securitisation of subaltern Others like the Roma, and how the reproduction of social hierarchies is predicated to a great extent upon their framing as security problems in the particular spatiality and materiality of the *campi nomadi*.

I do not suggest that all the Roma in camps utter critique as a unitary voice, and I do not wish to erase, in a romaniticising way, the internal inequalities and power relations among Roma themselves. During my fieldwork, I have encountered many instances in which power differentials, relations of exploitation, and mutual securitisations played out to stratify camp inhabitants across gender, legal status, class, and place of origin. At the same time, many of the conflicts that I witnessed are amenable to effects of the segregation of the Roma in squalid camps, in particular after the intensification of evictions from the more central areas of Rome. Competing for limited space and placed in camps without concern for familial structures, boundaries, and rivalries, Khorakhané Roma (from Bosnia) were pitted against Romanian newcomers, Serbian against Kosovari, and so on.

Topologies of security, *campi nomadi* as scene

The topological approach of security offers a helpful set of tools through which we can understand the multiplicity of security concerns and practices within particular spaces, and their continuous multiplication in fractal and ambiguous ways around invariant elements. Attention to the topologies of power (Collier 2009) in particular configurations makes it possible to conceptualise how heterogeneous elements – spaces, objects, policies, sensorial perceptions, institutional arrangements such as the racial policing of the Roma and so on – are continuously recombined.

The succession of the security measures and their immediate consequences described above – the declaration of the state of emergency due to urban insecurity, evictions, the need for new sources of income, the overcrowding of authorised camps and the material reorganisation of scrap metal storage, the multiplication of heaps of waste around camps, state neglect and the failure to manage waste, the ineffective policing of fires and the posting of army personnel in camps – traces the path of what Abboud et al. (2018, 279) call the 'unpredicted mutational effects' of an initial security measure. Even though the declaration of the state of emergency constitutes a textbook discursive securitisation à la Copenhagen School, all the steps of this mutation are deeply embedded in materiality, and various things – like the smoke of fires – mutate into agentive security objects that are recursively mobilised and reinvested again in a 'tilted topology of power' (Aparna, Hendrikx, and Lagendijk 2022) that has the criminalisation of the Roma at its core. In his analysis of securityscapes in South Africa, Thomas G. Kirsch (2019) emphasises the recursiveness of security measures, whereby wide-ranging security assemblages (Samimian-Darash and Stalcup 2016) are constructed through recursive iterations where one measure is the condition of possibility for another, in fractal ways. It is the transformations of the object when perceived from a multiplicity of points (in time and space), and from a multiplicity of registers (here, material and sensorial) that allows for insecurity to unfold as the continuous, multifarious, ever-shifting object that it is, while preserving its invariance (here, around the criminalisation of the Roma). A topological conceptualisation of (in)security focuses on the relations between the nodes that constitute a particular space rather than on their position, and captures the morphodynamism of security while isolating its invariance in the multitude of shapes it takes. The material discussed above shows how the security and insecurity of both Roma and non-Roma in and through the materiality of *campi nomadi* continuously co-constitute each other in the shape of a Möbius band, mediated through the sensorially apprehended materiality of the camp.

As ambivalent enclosure initially meant to protect 'nomadic' culture while simultaneously excluding and isolating its inhabitants, *campi nomadi* as securityscapes behave like a security scene in the sense discussed in the introduction to this forum, but also like a topological Möbius strip-like object where its inside and outside co-constitute each other. As a scene, *campi nomadi* are examples of 'points where power becomes actualised through heterogeneous dynamics of security topologies folded onto each other' (Dwyer, Langenohl, and Lottholz, this issue). They are the

emplaced staging of performative security measures (surveillance cameras that rarely work, army presence, the continuous mending of breeches in the fence, symbolically significant of boundary concerns). *Campi nomadi* produce and shape the relation between their inhabitants – their inside – and the demanders (and spectators) of the security measures enacted in their spaces. But they are also contested scenes, places where power and struggle become manifest through materialities and sensorialities that are differently incorporated in processes of securitisation, on one hand, and their inhabitants' political critique of their subalternisation, on the other.

Notes

1. Between 2014 and 2017 I have carried out an ethnography of formal and informal policing in the peripheries of Rome. My material encompassed mainly participant observation with a far-right neighbourhood patrol, a police unit tasked with the control and repression of Roma (in particular the inhabitants of *campi nomadi*), police document analysis, archival research on a corpus of around 2000 local newspaper articles from 1987 onwards, interviews with residents and participant observation in a campo nomadi in Rome, and digital ethnography. The first section draws on the analysis of newspaper articles containing the word *sicurezza*, selected through a search engine used on the digitalised versions of the newspaper *Il Messaggero*.
2. These are generally Roma who migrated from various Eastern European countries starting in the 1960s and settled in the peripheries of Rome. While sedentary, they are still mistakenly referred to as 'nomads' in Italy.
3. See for instance Decree 277/1991 regarding the 'safety and hygiene of labour' (*sicurezza e igiene del lavoro*).
4. Interview, August 2015.
5. Facebook post, April 2019.
6. Idem.
7. Interview, Roma man, August 2015.
8. Interview, Roma woman, May 2015.
9. Interview, Roma woman, October 2016.

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