

GHETTO POLITICS:

THE ORIGINS OF ROMA CAMP SEGREGATION IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT

Today the idea of a ghetto conjures images of a practice that was medieval and barbaric, yet this same institution is currently being repeated in the form of ‘nomad camps’ used to house Roma in Italy. Curiously, when the ghetto was developed in sixteenth-century Italy, it was only applied to Jews, and now it is only applied to Roma. This thesis seeks to explain why the ghettoization of Roma is occurring now, by looking at when the ghetto as an institution has been applied in the past. Using the paradigm of ‘the camp’ developed Giorgio Agamben, the ghetto is understood as a zone of indistinction where the normal rule of law is suspended in order to preserve the norm. In practice, the ghetto is used to segregate people who are seen as threatening to the sovereign but exist in a peculiar limbo because they can neither be integrated nor expelled from the political community. Whereas a large influx of Jews in the sixteenth century threatened to destabilise the papal state, today the swelling population of Roma challenge the system of a biopolitical world.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	3
THE STATE OF EXCEPTION.....	3
THE CAMP AS A PARADIGM.....	4
THE GHETTO AS A PARADIGM.....	6
THE GHETTOS OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY ITALY.....	8
WHY THE GHETTO?.....	9
GHETTO RULES.....	12
NOMAD CAMPS IN CONTEMPORARY ITALY	15
WHY NOMAD CAMPS?	16
NOMAD CAMP RULES.....	21
SEGREGATION POLICY REVISITED	23
ANSWERING THE PUZZLE	24
THE APPEAL OF THE GHETTO	25
CONCLUSION.....	27
BIBLIOGRAPHY	30

INTRODUCTION

The word 'ghetto' is an Italian invention, stemming from *ghéto* in the Venetian dialect meaning 'slag', a waste product left over after a metal has been separated from raw ore. In 1516 this slag was stored at a foundry on the same island in which the *Ghetto Novo* was established; a confined area where Jews were compelled to live under the Venetian Republic until 1797. Since 1516, 'the ghetto' has been reinvented in new places, in different time periods, with the same intention of preventing the dispersal of a minority group among the mainstream population. Today the idea of a 'Jewish ghetto' conjures images of a practice that was medieval and barbaric, yet this same practice of segregating a community, forcibly by law, is occurring in Italy today in the form of 'nomad camps' used to house Roma in Italy.

The word 'camp' suggests a place in which people reside temporarily, however these new constructions are long-term in which Roma live for an indefinite period of time, subjected to increased surveillance and little respect for their private lives. Curiously, Roma populations have existed in Italy since the fifteenth century, yet unlike with Jews, there were no ghettos constructed to house them during the Renaissance and Early Modern Period. The puzzle thus becomes: Why is the ghettoization of Roma occurring now after centuries of their presence in Italy? The two communities, the Jews in the early sixteenth century and the Roma in the late twentieth, must have shared something in common that was perceived as threatening to the broader community, to warrant their enforced segregation via the technique of limiting their living quarters to a finite space that is surrounded by walls and police patrolled.

This thesis argues that they each embodied a defining characteristic that was perceived as threatening to the survival of the state at that particular time. What we know as Italy today was a Papal State in the early modern period, and Jews were the deviant "other" who followed another religion. This was a time in which the Catholic Church was in crisis and the purity of the Christian community was of utmost importance. In modern times, the attitude towards religion has changed, and the Italian State no longer considers a Jewish minority a threat to its survival. The Roma are viewed as threatening because of their allegedly nomadic lifestyle, which has nothing to do with their religious beliefs. The construction of 'nomad camps' is justified by the Italian government as a means to solve the housing problem of a nomadic people, however, many Roma currently residing in the camps came from the former Yugoslavia after its dissolution, or more recently from Romania after its accession to the EU. In both former Yugoslavia and Romania they led sedentary lives, and went to Italy either to escape ethnic

conflict or to improve their quality of life. Also interned in the camps are Roma and Sinti whose ancestors have been sedentary in Italy for centuries. An alternative explanation for these ghettos is needed, as the idea of ‘nomad camps’ to house a perpetually wandering population is inaccurate and misleading. Furthermore, if a housing solution is all there is to it, then why are walls and surveillance necessary?

Both Jews in the Venetian Republic and Roma in late twentieth-century Italy have been perceived by the public as potential criminals or social deviants, partly as a result of their demonization by the state. Yet, this kind of prejudice has been a distinctive feature of their presence in Europe for centuries. Over the past five-hundred years policy towards the Roma has fluctuated from acceptance, to expulsion, to tolerance, to persecution, and now to the new establishment of ghettos named ‘nomad camps’. To understand why this new form of segregation has taken the form of a ghetto, we must understand what a ghetto is, when it is used, and what it allows the state to do. This leads us to the theoretical framework of this thesis.

Chapter One gives a definition of ‘the ghetto’ drawing on the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s conceptualisation of ‘the camp’, to argue that a ghetto is a space in which the normal rule of law is suspended so that new rules may apply. In this zone of indistinction, Jews and Roma are given a hybrid legal status somewhere between citizen and exile, so that the sovereign can treat them according to either category in times of convenience. In other words, ghetto inhabitants are both used and abused. They are not expelled by the state because at times they prove useful, yet they are not offered opportunities to integrate because stereotypes about them, often manipulated for political purposes, have created a culture of fear. It is this peculiar balance between inclusion and exclusion that creates a ghetto policy.

Chapters Two and Three are case studies, the first of which focuses on the Venetian Ghetto of 1516, Europe’s first official ghetto, and brief reference will also be made to the Ghetto of Rome that was established in response to the infamous Papal Bull *Cum Nimis Absurdum* in 1555. The next chapter discusses nomad camps in present day Italy. These case studies will analyse when ghettos occur, what they entail and why they are used, by applying the theoretical framework inspired by Agamben to empirical evidence. The importance that religion and nomadism play in each time period will be highlighted, leading us to Chapter Four, a comparative analysis that links these two case studies in order to provide an answer to our puzzle.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To recognize ‘the ghetto’ in its reoccurring formations, we must first understand its conceptual significance. This framework draws upon Agamben’s conceptualization of ‘the camp’ as a paradigm, to understand what the ghetto is, why it came about, and how it functions. Agamben defines ‘the camp’ as ‘*the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule*’.¹ To understand how this applies to ‘the ghetto’, I will begin by explaining *the state of exception*.

THE STATE OF EXCEPTION

The state of exception is a concept in legal theory that involves ‘the provisional abolition of the distinction among legislative, executive, and judicial powers’.² It is usually proclaimed as part of an emergency decree, allowing the sovereign to enact emergency laws that would otherwise be considered unacceptable, for the purpose of protecting a community that is somehow under siege. By including a suspension of the juridical order within the law, it gives legal form to what does not have legal form, allowing acts contrary to the normal rule of law to be committed.³ In Nazi Germany, for example, emergency laws were enacted in 1933 and not repealed until the end of the Second World War, leaving Germany in a *state of exception* throughout the whole period of the Third Reich, in which the normal rule of law was suspended for twelve years. In a *state of exception* violence that is absolutely outside the law is impossible, because it is included in the law through the very suspension of laws that apply to it.⁴ For the Third Reich, this made possible the physical elimination of political adversaries and citizens who, for some reason, could not be integrated into the political system.⁵

The creation of a state of exception is not just found in totalitarian states, but is also increasingly common in contemporary democracies. One example is the many scientific experiments that have been carried out on prisoners and persons sentenced to death, particularly in the United States.⁶ For a *state of exception* to occur, it is not necessary for law to be suspended in the entire state, but rather it may apply only to a pocket of land within a state. This land becomes neither external nor internal to the juridical order, but instead exists as a zone of indifference that is legally ambiguous.⁷ The sovereign uses emergency decrees, usually sparked by some kind of social crisis, to create a fictitious lacuna within the state that has rules of its own. Contemporary

¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 168-9.

² *The State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: Chicago Press, 2005), 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 1-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶ *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 154-9.

⁷ *The State of Exception*, 23.

examples include Guantanamo Bay, refugee camps, and detention centres, where the rights and responsibilities bestowed upon a citizen of the state do not apply to those interned within. The purpose of creating a state of exception is traditionally to safeguard the existence of the norm – that is, the law must be broken in order to protect the very existence of the law itself. If we use the Guantanamo Bay example, the idea is that if we do not garner necessary information from terrorists, then the United States as we know it may cease to exist. Hence torture, which is contrary to the normal rule of law, becomes possible by the suspension of the law within a territorial space, for the ultimate purpose of protecting the survival of the constitution.

THE CAMP AS A PARADIGM

Agamben begins his discussion of ‘the camp’ by noting the failure of the two most influential thinkers on the political problems of our time, Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt, to link their theories together to understand the transformation of politics into the realm of *bare life*. Foucault’s biopolitics never reached a discussion on the great totalitarian states of the twentieth century, whereas Arendt’s dedication to totalitarian states lacked any biopolitical perspective.⁸ By linking the two, we may arrive at an understanding of ‘the camp’ as a paradigm and its production of *bare life*.

Biopolitics is the interlacing of biological life with political life in the modern era; a phenomenon which has resulted in a dramatic increase in state power over the private life of its citizens. In traditional sovereignty before the modern era, sovereign power was uninterested in the way people lived their lives, concerning itself only with the death or punishment of those who posed a threat to the survival of the community. Foucault calls this sovereign function *to make die and to let live*.⁹ Here, sovereign power, be it that of a monarch, emperor or similar, was juridical. From the seventeenth century onwards, with the birth of the science of police, the state became increasingly concerned with the life and health of its subjects, and sovereign power was progressively transformed into what Foucault calls “biopower”; the incorporation of private life into the mechanisms and calculations of the state.¹⁰ Power thus became inversed into the formula *to make live and to let die*, in which state power became bureaucratic, deeply concerned with the production of life and the health, education and lifestyle of its citizens. This gave the sovereign, and by proxy the citizens of the state, the power to decide on who was to be included or excluded from political life, in other words, who was worthy of state protection and thus *forced to live* and who would be excluded from its protection and thus *left to die*.

⁸ *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 119-20.

⁹ *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 82.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Agamben argues that ‘the camp’ is the pure biopolitical space insofar as it is founded solely on the *state of exception*.¹¹ Those who live in a state of exception are neither *made to live* nor *left to die*, but suffer from a peculiar legal ambiguity in a zone of indistinction, where sovereign power has been transferred to the police who make decisions based on conscience. Anything becomes possible in this zone, because the rights and responsibilities that are normally bestowed upon a citizen do not apply, thus those who reside within it are afforded no formal legal protection. ‘The camp’ is the space in which a temporary suspension of the rule of law becomes a permanent spatial arrangement.¹² Initially used to explain the functioning of concentration camps, ‘the camp’ as a paradigm may take many forms, such as a refugee camp, a prison or even ghetto; any pocket of land within which the normal functions of sovereignty do not apply, and law and fact become indistinguishable.¹³ Using these pockets of land, the state may absolve itself of responsibility for the fate of the people inside.

Inside ‘the camp’, where biological life and political life are blurred together in a no-man’s land, we witness the production of *bare life*.¹⁴ One’s *bare life* exists in ‘a limit zone between life and death, inside and outside’ and lacks ‘all the rights and expectations that we customarily attribute to human existence’.¹⁵ The concept of *bare life* comes from the ancient Roman figure *homo sacer* who, as punishment for a crime, was expelled from the political community, and whose legal status was reduced to ‘a life that may be killed without the commission of homicide’.¹⁶ Here the human body is separated from one’s normal political status abandoned by the law, and subject to the possibility of extreme misfortunes.¹⁷ Human rights do not apply in *states of exception*. As Agamben argues, one of the greatest flaws of Western politics is the attempt ‘to found political liberties in the rights of the citizen’¹⁸ leaving no protection for the non-citizens; the human that loses its legal status, and is left with merely the quality of being human. The production of *bare life* is exemplified in the ‘the camp’, yet it also threatens to embody us all, as the modern biopolitical functions of the state increasingly reduce us to ‘animals whose life as living beings is at issue in their politics, but also – inversely – citizens whose very politics is at issue in their natural body’.¹⁹

¹¹ *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 123.

¹² *Ibid.*, 169.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.

THE GHETTO AS A PARADIGM

In modern times, our understanding of the word ‘ghetto’ has morphed to include areas that might more appropriately be called impoverished barrios, such as African American or immigrant ghettos in the United States. This thesis uses the term ‘ghetto’ to refer specifically to a place in which a group is *compelled* to live as a matter of government policy for an indefinite period of time, as was the case in 1516 Venice, and as we are seeing today in the forced relocation of Italy’s Roma from informal settlements to government-run camps. The physical separation between those inside and those outside is a representation of a social and political boundary, concreted in the very embodiment of the ghetto walls. Inside the ghetto the exception becomes the rule. Ghetto inhabitants live in a permanent *state of exception*: a territorial confine in which the normal rule of law is suspended, and those interned experience a different set of rights and responsibilities than do citizens of the state.

If we understand ‘the ghetto’ as functioning like ‘the camp’, then it is interesting to note that in 1516 we already see the emergence of an inversion of sovereign power, in the sense that those interned inside ghetto walls were *left to die*. We must understand this formula of Foucault’s does not necessarily mean a literal death but rather a political death with regard to the capacity of those interned to be incorporated into the broader political community. To be confined to a ghetto is not a voluntary decision of the inhabitants, and thus the ghetto’s very existence denotes a vacuum of political agency. Whilst a degree of physical safety is sometimes found inside, as many have argued, particularly in situations where a minority population would otherwise be subject to violent attacks or discrimination on the outside, a ghetto is not self-sufficient in terms of the economic needs that are necessary to human survival, but rather very dependent upon the relationship between the ghetto’s inhabitants and the outside world. The problem is that equality with the broader community is denied, and those inside reside in a permanent state of legal ambiguity, allowing the possibility for atrocities to be committed by the civility and the police who temporarily act as sovereign.²⁰ This is not to say that no rules exist within the ghetto. As Agamben writes, ‘because the state of exception is always something different from anarchy and chaos, in a juridical sense, an order still exists in it, even if it is not a juridical order’.²¹ Rather, the normal rule of law is suspended to allow new rules to be created.

In the ghetto, the distinction between what is public and what is private is deactivated.²² Increased surveillance and emergency measures mean that private life becomes public business, and public business revolves around one’s private life. This allows for the possibility of

²⁰ Ibid., 174.

²¹ Schmitt 1922, cited in *The State of Exception*, 33.

²² Ibid., 50.

unprecedented levels of biopolitical control with no recourse to juridical distinctions between the business of the state, and the private right of the individual. The creation of a zone of indistinction also means that people can be included and excluded at the same time. This allows the state to engage with people inside when it is convenient, ignore them when it is not, and persecute them when a scapegoat is needed as an explanation for societal problems. In blurring one's legal and political status with biological life, a new set of rights and responsibilities for those interned are created, and all unfortunate circumstances that occur are justified via the emergency degree that masquerades as the guarantor of human survival.

If 'the ghetto' resides in a *state of exception* where the law is suspended in order to preserve the norm, then to understand why it has been applied to some people and not others, those interned must logically somehow threaten the norm; they must defy the status quo. Furthermore, some kind of external crisis must have occurred to spark the initiation of a ghetto policy and its use of new emergency measures. Inside the ghetto, we would find a no-man's land, in which fact and right become one. We will look for evidence of these assumptions in the next two chapters of this thesis.

THE GHETTOS OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY ITALY

The situation for Jews in Europe declined in the late Middle Ages with the intensity of famine, disease and economic failures. Jews traditionally served as scapegoats for such crises, such as in times of plague in the fourteenth century when they were blamed for poisoning the wells.²³ Accusations of anything from cannibalism to ritualistic murders occurred, and a 'mythical Jew' figure had been created; the Jew was made to personify 'the entirety of Christian society's failings and flaws'.²⁴ He was posited as the inverse of the ideal Christian, often used by religious orders to guide Christian behaviour by providing an example of what they must never become. As a result of the socially pernicious being systematically linked to Judaism, the idea of integrating a Jewish community into a Christian one became virtually impossible. Christians both feared and despised Jews. Even eating with a Jew was believed to pollute oneself.²⁵ In Italy, the situation worsened in the fifteenth century with the preaching of the mendicant orders, as the Franciscans and Dominicans were afraid that Jews would corrupt the faithful.²⁶ As anti-Jewish sentiment spread, the physical separation of Jews became more widely promoted as public policy.²⁷

In Venice, until March 1516, Jews had been banned from staying in the city for more than fifteen days per year, and solely for purpose of trade, because the Venetians objected to their permanent presence in the city.²⁸ Yet as more and more Jewish refugees arrived in the region, the pressures to incorporate them into the city's topography increased. Due to the expulsion of Jews in other regions of Europe, northern Italy was struck by an immigration crisis. The first large wave came from the Iberian Peninsula after Jews were expelled from Spain by the Catholic Monarchs in 1492.²⁹ More refugees came in 1497 after King Manuel of Portugal had all Jews forcibly baptised, and many fled to Italy so they could return to their faith.³⁰ In southern Italy, fifty-thousand Jews were expelled from Sicily in 1492, and then from the Kingdom of

²³ Kenneth R. Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 239.

²⁴ Ibid., 234-8.

²⁵ Ibid., 235-6.

²⁶ Ibid., 260.

²⁷ Samuel D. Gruber, "Selective Inclusion: Integration and Isolation of Jews in Medieval Italy," in *Framing Jewish Culture: Boundaries and Representation*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2014), 100.

²⁸ Benjamin Ravid, "The Venetian Government and the Jews," in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, ed. Robert C. Davis and Benjamin Ravid (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 8.

²⁹ Alisa Meyuhass Ginio, "Introduction," in *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Mediterranean World after 1492*, ed. Alisa Meyuhass Ginio (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 5.

³⁰ Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe*, 265.

Naples³¹ and various other communities in the region between 1510 and 1541.³² Northern Italy was faced with a swelling population of people it was unable to integrate.

Rather than expelling the Jews, as many other regions had done, the Venetians began to realise that Jewish commercial affairs had the potential to bring considerable revenue to the Republic.³³ The first two decades of the sixteenth century was an anxious time for the Venetians as far as the economy was concerned. The Portuguese has established a new navigational route around Africa to India which meant that Venetians had lost their monopoly in the spice trade in the eastern Mediterranean.³⁴ Furthermore, the War with the Ottomans at the turn of the century had left them with heavy financial losses.³⁵ A new war began in 1509, The War of the League of Cambrai, in which Pope Julius II teamed up with Louis XII of France and the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I in an anti-Venetian alliance attempting to curb Venice's influence in the region. This war lasted until 1517 and caused not just a financial burden, but also a political crisis.³⁶ Many Jews had important trade connections, particularly the Marranos who had maintained connections with Spanish and Portuguese economies, and the Levantine Jews who were responsible for bringing goods from upper and lower Romania.³⁷ Furthermore, Jewish moneylending helped to finance wars and relieve the socioeconomic problems of an economy that was increasingly becoming urbanised, without violating Christian religious laws against the practise of usury.³⁸

WHY THE GHETTO?

Jews in the early sixteenth century suffered from a constructed identity that incorporated both desirable and undesirable elements. Unlike with the modern secular state, maintaining religious homogeneity was of the utmost importance to social cohesion in the Middle Ages. Judaism, like all non-Catholic religions, constituted a threat to the Roman Catholic Church, and was viewed as particularly incorrigible at a time when the Church's power and influence was under threat by the Renaissance humanist movement and the emerging Reformation. Jews,

³¹ Renata Segre, "Sephardic Settlements in Sixteenth-Century Italy: A Historical and Geographical Survey," in *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Mediterranean World after 1492*, ed. Alisa Meyuhas Ginio (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 112.

³² Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe*, 303.

³³ Benjamin Arbel, "Jews in International Trade: The Emergency of the Levantines and Pontentines," in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, ed. Robert C. Davis and Benjamin Ravid (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 83.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, "Jews, Crypto-Jews, and the Inquisition," *ibid.*, 89.

³⁸ Christians followed the Jewish interpretation of the biblical laws of Exodus 23:24, Leviticus 25:35-38, and Deuteronomy 23:20-21, which forbade moneylending to co-religionists. See Benjamin Ravid, "The Venetian Government and the Jews," *ibid.* (Johns Hopkins University Press), 8.

however, were also valued moneylenders, merchants and traders; not because an inherent characteristic drove them towards such occupations, but because their occupational capacity was socially constructed over centuries, resulting from laws that limited the extent of their engagement with the economy. 'Judaism' had thus become both desirable and undesirable at the same time, falling into a 'zone of indistinction', and requiring a specific tailored arrangement to deal with such a situation.

The 'ghetto' was created for a people whom the state did not wish to expel, yet with whom the local population did not want to associate. By keeping Jews within the city in a segregated area, the Venetian Republic could benefit from their trade connections and moneylending. A Jewish presence in the city also meant that Jews could continue to be blamed for things that went wrong. Furthermore, the social and political boundary, materialised in ghetto walls, meant that the Christian population was less in danger of being converted to Judaism or corrupted through association. Their segregation protected Christian society from 'danger, stain, or contamination'.³⁹ The benefit for Jews was that they were allowed to settle down in the city, often after years on the run, and were given complete freedom of religious observance within the ghetto.⁴⁰ As one man said, 'I have come to this city in order to put on my head this Cardinal's hat, for in Spain this was prohibited'.⁴¹ New Christians who moved to Venice went directly to the ghetto where they could convert to Judaism and become part of the Jewish community inside,⁴² and so the Republic of Venice became a haven for Jewish exiles.⁴³ It appeared as if a compromise solution had been reached.

The ghetto was an entirely new institution that set a precedent for Christian-Jewish interactions in Italy over the next three hundred years, and it still exists today for other minorities groups, although often called other names. Whilst it brought a degree of stability and predictability for Jews in Venice, the ghetto as an institution exists outside the formal legal framework, and inhabitants are subjected to rules that change at the whim of the government or law enforcement officials. Unfortunately, in the sixteenth century not everyone needed a Jewish presence as much as the Venetians. When other regions in Italy adopted this model, it usually signified the deterioration of their previous existence, particularly after the infamous Papal Bull *Cum Nimis Absurdum* in 1555 placed severe religious and economic constraints on Jews in Rome

³⁹ Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, "Venice between Jerusalem, Byzantium, and Divine Retribution: The Origins of the Ghetto," in *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Mediterranean World after 1492*, ed. Alisa Meyuhus Ginio (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 178.

⁴⁰ Ravid, "The Venetian Government and the Jews," 23.

⁴¹ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Santo Uffizio, Busta 107, cited in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Issac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 196.

⁴² Ravid, "The Venetian Government and the Jews," 15.

⁴³ Ginio, "Introduction," 9.

and elsewhere, locking previously free people into gated communities and forcing them to attend catholic sermons.⁴⁴ These new laws, which required men to wear yellow pointed hats and women yellow badges, were clearly intended to degrade Jews and limit their personal freedom.

It was the Counter-Reformation that sparked the creation of the Ghetto of Rome in Sant'Angelo in 1555.⁴⁵ The Protestant schism and the threat of Ottoman advancement on European territory had convinced Pope Paul IV, a former Chief Inquisitor, that the End of Days was near, and as Saint Paul had foretold, the moment for the Jews "to enter" had arrived.⁴⁶ He believed that in speeding up the Jews' conversion he would hasten an inevitable process. He thought that if conditions inside the ghetto were harsh enough, they would voluntarily renounce their Judaism in order to live beyond the ghetto walls. The Jews were burdened with unbearable taxes and forced to attend conversionary sermons. In concordance with these new laws, the house for converts outside the ghetto was expanded, in anticipation of new arrivals.⁴⁷ Most Jews, however, refused to convert, and instead became even more physically and psychologically isolated from society.⁴⁸

The appeal of the ghetto for the majority population was that it solved the problem of a minority that was both desirable and undesirable at the same time, by placing them in a 'zone of indistinction' in which the normal rule of law was suspended and new rules could be applied. In the ghetto, Jews participated in the broader community only when and how the government saw fit. Roman popes often worked closely with Jewish financiers and Jewish banking firms, and doctors and musicians were employed at the papal court.⁴⁹ Yet as night fell, the figure of the mythical Jew was safely locked away in order to protect the survival of the Christian community. They were also used as examples of what not to become, in order dictate the behaviour of the majority population. As stated by Kenneth Stow, 'the Jews continued presence in Christian society was judged necessary, if only for them to personify the absence of belief and its punitive effects'.⁵⁰ According to Joshua Zimmerman, 'when times were good, the Jews were valued bankers. And when times were bad, they were perfect scapegoats'.⁵¹ Italy needed a way to preserve the presence of Jews without advocating their integration. The boundary between expulsion and inclusion had constantly wavered throughout their 1500 year presence in Europe, yet now Italy had found a way to do both at the same time. As an anonymous early Christian

⁴⁴ Joshua D. Zimmermann, *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2005), 23.

⁴⁵ Gruber, "Selective Inclusion: Integration and Isolation of Jews in Medieval Italy," 104-5.

⁴⁶ Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe*, 306.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 305.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 307.

⁴⁹ Gruber, "Selective Inclusion: Integration and Isolation of Jews in Medieval Italy," 97-107.

⁵⁰ Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe*, 242-3.

⁵¹ Zimmermann, *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule*, 23.

author once wrote, they 'reside in their own fatherlands, but as if they were non-citizens; they take part in all things as if they were citizens and suffer all things as if they were strangers'.⁵²

GHETTO RULES

The *Ghetto Novo* in Venice housed approximately 2500 Jews of various ethnicities in an area that was only allowed to develop vertically.⁵³ As the population increased, Jews had to subdivide their apartments, which created very over-crowded conditions.⁵⁴ It was a multicultural environment inside; the inhabitants came from Spain, France, Germany, Italy, the Balkans and the Levant.⁵⁵ There were two entrances to the ghetto, both of which had gates that were opened at sunrise and closed at sunset, to confine Jews inside overnight. Four Christian guards guarded the gates, and the Jews were charged with the responsibility of paying them. High walls were built on two sides of the ghetto that overlooked small canals, so that no one inside could see out. Two boats patrolled these canals day and night to ensure that ghetto legislations were being enforced.⁵⁶

Inside the ghetto was a zone of legal ambiguity. Rules as to what Jews could and couldn't do fluctuated according to the desires of the broader community. In the Roman Ghetto, Jews were prevented from engaging in trade except for in secondhand goods.⁵⁷ In Venice, Jews had to pay a rent increase of a third to Christian property owners for their residence inside the ghetto; a revenue that was exempt from taxation so that property owners would not complain about their presence.⁵⁸ Only merchants and Jewish doctors treating Christian patients were permitted to be outside the ghetto after hours,⁵⁹ thus only in instances when it was seen as in the ultimate interest of the Christian community. In 1526, after the imposition of a new tax, Jews threatened to leave, but the government knew that the local people depended on their credit at a time of poor harvest, so it compensated for the tax by granting them new moneylending and trade permits, eventually reaching an economic compromise stipulated in the Venetian Charters.⁶⁰ In 1541, the *Ghetto Novo* was expanded to include the new *Ghetto Vecchio*, for the purpose of encouraging the Levantine Jews to establish a permanent base in Venice, to take full advantage of their trade connections in Romania. Some Jewish traders were Ottoman subjects who only came to Venice

⁵² Anonymous, cited in Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe*, 241.

⁵³ Roberto Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 77.

⁵⁴ Ravid, "The Venetian Government and the Jews," 20.

⁵⁵ Ibid., x.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁷ Zimmermann, *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule*, 23.

⁵⁸ Ennio Concina, "Owners, Houses, Functions: New Research on the Origins of the Venetian Ghetto," in *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Mediterranean World after 1492*, ed. Alisa Meyuhas Ginio (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 180.

⁵⁹ Ravid, "The Venetian Government and the Jews," 21.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 11.

for short intervals, but in order to enforce ghetto policy it became necessary to require all Jews, whether permanent or temporary, to reside in the ghetto.⁶¹ The right to Jewish moneylending in Venice was again renewed in 1553 when the Senate decreed that permission for the Jews to reside in the city had been extended for the sole purpose of preventing Christians from engaging in usury, which was a violation of both divine and civil laws.⁶² Thus, the justification for breaking the law for the minority was to save the law for the majority, as in all *states of exception*. Then, in 1573, when the poor were struggling to keep afloat, Jews were told that they were required to manage pawnshops for the Christian needy.⁶³

As we have seen, the ghetto began as a *state of exception*; a territorial space in which law was suspended in response to an emergency situation, and new rules were created in order to protect the survival of the broader community. Yet what may have been intended as a short term solution to a migration and economic crisis turned into more than three centuries of ghettoization, because the both positively and negatively constructed nature of 'Jewish identity' had not changed. Eventually, the ghetto model was adopted throughout Italy, when in 1562 every Jew living outside a designated ghetto was to be expelled from the Papal State.⁶⁴ As argued by Roberto Bonfil, 'the overall attitude toward the Jews was in fact far more liberal during the period of the ghettos than it had been before',⁶⁵ as accusations of ritual murder disappeared almost completely, and the frequency of attacks against Jews markedly declined.⁶⁶ The general public felt safer without Jews being dispersed among them, knowing that they were confined inside the ghetto walls at night. The price of their tolerated presence, however, was the physical segregation of their living confines, and the loss of their legal and political status. Inside the ghetto, Jews created their own form of self-government, as they had to organise the payment of the state's taxation demands, take care of ghetto maintenance, and resolve basic issues of both a secular and religious nature.⁶⁷ Of course, however, the nature of the political discussions within the ghetto usually consisted of negotiating ways in which to deal with the restrictions imposed upon them from outside. They existed in a purely biopolitical space in which fact and right became one, giving them no recourse for legal protection. They were neither included nor excluded from the Italian community, but rather existed in a no-man's land subjected to the

⁶¹ Benjamin Arbel, "Jews in International Trade: The Emergency of the Levantines and Pontentines," *ibid.* (The Johns Hopkins University Press), 80.

⁶² Benjamin Ravid, "The Venetian Government and the Jews," *ibid.* (Johns Hopkins University Press), 12.

⁶³ David J. Malkiel, "The Ghetto Republic," *ibid.* (The Johns Hopkins University Press), 119.

⁶⁴ Gruber, "Selective Inclusion: Integration and Isolation of Jews in Medieval Italy," 100.

⁶⁵ Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 72.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Robert C. Davis, "Introduction," in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, ed. Robert C. Davis and Benjamin Ravid (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), xiv.

whims of local authorities that blurred together their public and private lives for either exploitative or conversionary purposes.

The *Ghetto Novo* was abolished in 1797 after the fall of the Venetian Republic. Napoleon had decided that Jewish segregation was an aberration of the sacred and inalienable rights of man and that, in the new secular state system, Jews should be regarded as equal citizens. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789, upon which our modern nation-state system is believed to be based,⁶⁸ put an end to the prominence of the Catholic Church in political affairs, and ushered in a new era in which the sovereign was no longer concerned with the spirituality of its subjects, but rather with the production of biopower, in which the basic biological features of humanity became part of political strategy. Judaism, as a spiritual ‘other’, no longer constituted a threat to sovereign power.

⁶⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 126.

NOMAD CAMPS IN CONTEMPORARY ITALY

From 1789 onward, with the birth of the secular nation-state, sovereign power lost interest in the spirituality of its people and instead became concerned with the life and health of its subjects. Over time, an obsession with religion turned into a preoccupation with the production of biopower. The Roma presented a challenge for this new system, as in order for social contract theory to work – that is, for a government to secure legitimacy over its people – it has to obtain the consent from those governed.⁶⁹ As a stateless nation of people, the Roma did not always conform to the new territorial boundaries imposed upon them, nor did they accept the new rights and responsibilities that governments expected of their citizens.

From the Middle Ages to the Modern Era, the constructed identity of Roma changed considerably in line with the preoccupations of a new society. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Roma were rumoured to steal children, wreak havoc and evil, fornicate with the devil, and were even believed to have made the nails that were used to crucify Jesus on the cross.⁷⁰ While society is no longer concerned with mystical capabilities, religious loyalties or sexual deviance, the modern nation-state's preoccupation with issues such as housing and hygiene has resulted in the Roma being stigmatized as dirty vagrants; criticized for living in 'filthy encampments' and associated with 'stench, sewage and disease wherever they went'.⁷¹ Today, unofficial settlements on road sides, under bridges, or in fields, defy what the nation-state sees as its modern function: to ensure a certain standard and style of living, thus the visibly smooth functioning of the state.

Roma today are also stereotyped as beggars and thieves, often blamed in times of economic slumps for citizens' financial woes. After evicting the people in an informal Roma settlement on 28 May 2000, the City of Rome's Advisor for Nomad Affairs, Dr Luigi Lusi, said in a press release that 'apart from dismantling illegal camps [we] managed to evict dangerous criminals. We found objects in their possession worth more than one billion lira'.⁷² There was no proof given that the Roma had in fact stolen this money; it was just assumed that people without official housing must be poor and so this money must logically have been stolen. In fact, many Roma in Italy are stateless or in a legal limbo, so their inability to access the housing market is

⁶⁹ Robert W McGee, "The Theory of Secession and Emerging Democracies: A Constitutional Solution," *Stanford Journal of International Law* 28 (1991): 450.

⁷⁰ ERRC, "Campland: Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy," in *Country Report Series* (Budapest, Hungary: European Roma Rights Centre, 2000), 10.

⁷¹ Jim Mac Laughlin, "The Gypsy as 'Other' in European Society: Towards a Political Geography of Hate," *The European Legacy: Towards New Paradigms* 4, no. 3 (2008): 41.

⁷² Approximately five million euros. See ERRC, "Campland: Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy," 33.

often related to their lack of documentation, not necessarily their financial capacity to engage in real estate.

Furthermore, the Roma are viewed as dangerous criminals who disturb the public peace. Whilst crime is present in all communities, if a crime is committed by a Roma person, tabloids always specify their ethnic identity, and in this way they create a connection between the Roma community and criminality in the public mentality. Consequently, Roma are often blamed for crimes they didn't commit, and police officers have been known to physically abuse Roma in order to force a confession.⁷³ In La Scampia in Naples, a nomad camp was built as the result of a road accident that occurred on 21 June 1999 when a Romani man accidentally hit and killed a local girl. The next morning locals armed with wooden clubs, guns and gasoline set fire to the Romani settlements and drove out one thousand people, with police refusing to intervene.⁷⁴ Interestingly, it was not the actions of the Roma man, but rather the public backlash that disturbed public order and prompted the building of the new camp. 700 Roma from unofficial settlements were re-located to the camp to keep the peace.⁷⁵ Thus, the problem became one of *keeping the masses under control* rather than a direct response to Roma criminality.

In the modern times, therefore, Roma are stereotyped as criminals, thieves and dirty vagrants; dangerous, unwilling to work, and unwilling to settle. It is a common occurrence that the constructed identity of an 'outgroup' in society is made to embody what the sovereign does not want its people to become. From the nature of these stereotypes we can see that the modern nation-state is concerned with assuring that its citizens maintain a respectable sedentary lifestyle, and that they engage with both the housing market and labour force, in order to strengthen the social and economic stability of the state.

WHY NOMAD CAMPS?

Over the past thirty years, Italy has witnessed the construction of many 'nomad camps', where unofficial Romani settlements have been systematically bulldozed, with their inhabitants forcibly transferred to areas surrounded by high metal fencing, often on city outskirts, usually consisting of caravans or poorly insulated metal huts.⁷⁶ On the surface, 'nomad camps' are presented as correctional facilities for a group of social deviants; places in which the private life

⁷³ Ibid., 37-45.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 72-73.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Vivaldi, "The Pursuit of "Happiness", in *Going Nowhere? Western Balkan Roma and EU Visa Liberation* (Budapest, Hungary: ERRC, 2014), 54.

⁷⁶ Isabella Clough Marinaro, "Between Surveillance and Exile: Biopolitics and the Roma in Italy," *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 1, no. 2 (2009): 278-9.

of Roma can be controlled.⁷⁷ Once the idea of the ‘nomad’ became fixed in the local psyche, the popular belief spread that nomads ‘must be educated and adapt to a normal sedentary way of life’⁷⁸ in order to cure their anti-social behaviour.⁷⁹ This does not explain, however, why they are called ‘nomad camps’ when the majority of the inhabitants are in fact not nomadic. The government benefits from the belief that it is turning Roma into respectable, sedentary citizens; as it is praised for solving a problem of health, crime and public security. In reality, however, it is actually sweeping a much deeper problem under the rug.

Just as a large influx of Jewish refugees preceded the establishment of the Venetian ghetto, it is the migration of Roma to Italy over the past few decades that has sparked a social crisis. The 1970s was the first time in Italy that immigration exceeded emigration, and the country was unprepared.⁸⁰ During this time citizens from the former Yugoslavia were granted the right to travel to Italy to work, and many Roma took advantage of this opportunity to further their economic status.⁸¹ With the Balkan conflicts in the 1990s, immigration to Italy increased drastically as refugees flocked to join pre-established migrant networks, often consisting of extended family members. Thousands of Roma in Italy are currently stateless, being unable to access citizenship in the post-Yugoslav states once their Yugoslav passports expired,⁸² and because the system for regularising their status in Italy is long, complicated and virtually inaccessible.⁸³ Until now, the Italian government has been either unwilling or unable to process claims to refugee status or provide adequate legal assistance to individuals who are for other reasons in a legal limbo. With the expansion of the EU to incorporate Romania and Bulgaria, a further wave of migrants arrived, many of whom were Roma. Due both to the prejudices associated with Roma that are held by the local population, and the impossibility of impoverished and often undocumented people participating in either the labour or the housing market, once again Italy is faced with a mass influx of people who are visibly noticeable that it is unable to integrate.

The distinctive characteristic about the Roma is portrayed in the misnomer used to describe them – their ‘nomadness’. The idea of a ‘nomadic’ population may well have been an honest mistake at first, as many Sinti who came to Northern Italy before the 1980s did in fact

⁷⁷ Isabella Clough Marinaro and Ulderico Daniele, "Roma and Humanitarianism in the Eternal City," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16, no. 5 (2011): 625.

⁷⁸ Giovanni Picker, "Welcome 'In'. Left-Wing Tuscany and Romani Migrants (1987-2007)," *ibid.*: 616.

⁷⁹ Giovanni Picker and Roccheggiani Gabriele, "Abnormalising Minorities. The State and Expert Knowledge Addressing the Roma in Italy," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 21, no. 2 (2014): 195.

⁸⁰ Picker, "Welcome 'In'. Left-Wing Tuscany and Romani Migrants (1987-2007)," 610.

⁸¹ Vivaldi, "The Pursuit of 'Happiness'," 55.

⁸² Maylis de Verneuil, "Romani Migration Resulting in Statelessness: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina," *ibid.*

⁸³ Barbara Pierro, Emma Ferulano, and Kitt Baracsi, "Residence Nowhere," *ibid.*, 36.

display a strong attachment to travelling, preferring to work on a seasonal basis.⁸⁴ In Tuscany, it was the left-wing regional council who, at the end of the 1980s, began constructing fenced camps for Romani immigrants. There was a well-meaning ideology behind the construction of the first camps, as they were designed to protect what was believed to be traditional Romani culture.⁸⁵ The goal was to allow nomads to keep travelling, and to have sites in which they could temporarily settle down before moving on again, instead of creating unofficial settlements. Unfortunately, Roma were not consulted beforehand, nor were they present in any discussions on policy.⁸⁶ However, the Roma who were forcibly displaced in the conflicts in Yugoslavia, or who came as economic migrants from Eastern Europe, previously led sedentary lifestyles. The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) has conducted interviews with Roma throughout Italy, and the general consensus, when asked if they prefer to move from place to place, was that 'No, we want houses and a life like yours'.⁸⁷ Yet the label 'nomad' is applied indiscriminately to both Roma and Sinti populations regardless of whether they are Italian citizens, migrants or refugees, and without recognition of their previous sedentary lifestyles.⁸⁸ One particular story told by the ERRC of a man, Mr F.S., from the Casilino camp in Rome, illustrated the racist nature of Italian housing policies. Mr F.S. was a Roma man from Yugoslavia who came to Italy in 1969. He built himself a shack at the foot of a hill where he lived with non-Roma from Calabria and Sicily, also in makeshift houses. In 1985 the authorities bulldozed the houses, and the Calabrians and Sicilians were given houses in a government apartment building half a kilometre away, whereas Mr F.S. and his family were relocated to a nomad camp.⁸⁹

The stereotype of 'nomad' is enforced in the public psyche by the fact that many Roma communities are constantly moving from one informal settlement to another. Yet in reality, this is not a lifestyle choice, but rather a consequence of a series of evictions in which their informal settlements are demolished and they must keep seeking out new locations to settle. In unauthorised settlements in Milan, for example, forced evictions occur on average every two to five months, and some families have been moving from place to place for years as a result.⁹⁰ Not so long ago, in the town of Cernusco sul Naviglio in the province of Milan, the mayor of the

⁸⁴ Isabella Clough Marinaro and Nando Sigona, "Introduction Anti-Gypsyism and the Politics of Exclusion: Roma and Sinti in Contemporary Italy," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16, no. 5 (2011): 584.

⁸⁵ See Giovanni Picker, "Welcome 'In'. Left-Wing Tuscany and Romani Migrants (1987-2007)," *ibid.*; "Left Wing Progress? Neo-Nationalism and the Case of Romani Migrants in Italy," in *The Gypsy 'Menace'. Populism and the New Anti-Gypsy Politics*, ed. Michael Stewart (London: Hurst & Co, 2012); Picker and Gabriele, "Abnormalising Minorities. The State and Expert Knowledge Addressing the Roma in Italy."

⁸⁶ Picker, "Welcome 'In'. Left-Wing Tuscany and Romani Migrants (1987-2007)," 614.

⁸⁷ ERRC, "Campland: Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy," 11.

⁸⁸ Nando Sigona, "How Can a 'Nomad' Be a 'Refugee'? Kosovo Roma and Labelling Policy in Italy," *Sociology* 37, no. 1 (2003): 75.

⁸⁹ ERRC, "Campland: Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy," 22.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28-31.

town Mr Paolo Frigerio declared that he would pay five million Italian lire⁹¹ to 'any farmer willing to spray manure on an area where a group of Roma were temporarily residing in camper vans in the town', in order to encourage them to leave.⁹² Sometimes their documents are torn up by officers as they are evicted,⁹³ which adds to the impossibility of ever legalising their status in Italy. Under these circumstances, the Roma are frequently not given an opportunity to play the role of 'respectable citizen', despite this expectation being imposed upon them. Just as the Jewish constructed identity was a product of the laws enforced upon them in the sixteenth century, the way many Roma behave today is inextricably linked to their social stigmatization, and legal status.

Here the choice of misnomer is important because it sheds light on the government's preoccupation with migration. Associating the 'outgroup' with nomadism tells broader society that nomadism is bad; and implicitly that *mobility* is bad. And mobility and migration are key political issues in contemporary society. In a world of increased globalisation, global mobility is putting pressure on the Westphalian nation-state system upon which political communities are organised. The expansion of the EU has increased this pressure with the recent migration of Eastern Europeans to the West. The immigration situation in Italy today is viewed through an emergency lens, particularly with the arrival of many boats of refugees from Northern Africa. 'Camps' are frequently a response to the sovereign feeling of a loss of control over who becomes a part of its 'protected' community in situations when the smooth functioning of the state is at threat. Modern liberal sentiments do not allow for the explicit condemnation of migration, or of asylum seekers, and certainly not of mobility within the EU, yet the term 'nomad' emphasises that the lifestyle of Roma is not 'normal'; that *mobility* is not normal. The concept of nomadism, and hence *mobility*, is also stigmatized by linking it with a population that are stereotyped as criminals and social deviants.

What the 'outgroup' of a society usually signifies is a weakness in a system that is ill-equipped to accommodate certain elements. In part, these camps function as immigration or detention centres, disguising Italy's bureaucratic deficiencies by placing the blame upon the cultural traits of camp inhabitants. The term 'nomad camp' also allows the government to avoid accusations of racism, as 'nomadism' is a behavioural stereotype rather than a label based on ethnicity. Resolving the legal status of stateless Roma would require not just willingness on behalf of the government, but also bureaucratic changes and significant costs associated with access to social services and integration schemes. Since Roma have been lumped together as one

⁹¹ Approximately 2500 euros

⁹² In the year 2000. See ERRC, "Campland: Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy," 8.

⁹³ Ibid., 37-45.

ethnic group, believed to have a homogenous culture, ‘nomad camp’ policies have been applied indiscriminately, even to Roma who are Italian citizens.

The Roma in Italy suffer from a unique situation – they are perpetually told they must become something that they are not allowed to become; respectable citizens; one of us. This leaves them in a no-man’s land, creating a situation in which integration is impossible. Their behaviour defies what the nation-state sees as the social responsibility of its citizens, for which they are perpetually critiqued, yet, as long as they exist outside the law, they are incapable of participating in the broader Italian community. Rather than resolving this scandal by legalising their status and combating stereotypes and prejudice that inhibit their social mobility, the government has opted for the creation of a ‘zone of indistinction’ where illegality is placed within the law by its explicit exclusion – in a *state of exception*. As once proclaimed by Walter Benjamin, ‘what the law can never tolerate – what it feels as a threat with which it is impossible to come to terms – is the existence of a violence outside the law; and this is not because the ends of such a violence are incompatible with law, but because of “its mere existence outside the law”’.⁹⁴ Violence outside the law signifies that the government has lost control of its people, but it also puts the existence of the law itself into crisis. An inability to socially integrate Roma has created public hostility towards them, something which results in violent outcomes that the state cannot control, so it has sought to contain this problem by locking it away, through the establishment of ghettos. In this space, where the rule of law is suspended, inhabitants are abandoned by the law for the purpose of upholding the law and preventing a potential crisis.

The benefit of the ghettos for the Italian government is that, along with suspending the law, it temporarily suspends the necessity of making systemic bureaucratic changes to immigration and asylum seeker procedures. Yet, by placing Roma in a no-man’s land where their rights are ambiguous, it also allows them to be used as pawns in a political game. Although viewed as undesirable by the local population, the Italian government has actually benefitted from the presence of the Roma through their constructed criminal identity. Roma have been demonised so that the government can be seen as actively keeping the peace by their internment. As Clough Marinaro argues, ‘Italian politicians on all sides have increasingly used the criminalization of Roma as a significant electoral device, presenting the group’s assumed inherent *potential* for crime as the basis for arguing that they must disappear or be punished. Politicians can thus portray themselves as the protectors of the electorate’s integrity and security’.⁹⁵ In essence, whilst politicians may publicly argue that the Roma should disappear, in fact they do not want this to happen, as their presence creates a problem which politicians can be seen to ‘solve’.

⁹⁴ Benjamin 1921, cited in Agamben, *The State of Exception*, 53.

⁹⁵ Clough Marinaro, "Between Surveillance and Exile: Biopolitics and the Roma in Italy," 270.

Counterproductive integration policies are sometimes intentional, because they maintain the status quo of an ‘outgroup’ that can be used as a political tool. In the electoral campaign of 2008, for example, Berlusconi promised ‘zero tolerance against Roma, criminals and clandestines’, and consequently gained a lot of popular support.⁹⁶ Then, after Berlusconi was elected, he enacted the Nomad Emergency legislation, allowing emergency security measures to be carried out by the police, the army and the Red Cross.⁹⁷ In part, this decree was in response to the ‘Mailat case’ in which a Romani migrant was falsely accused of raping and killing an Italian woman.⁹⁸ Roma in unofficial settlements in Rome were been forcibly relocated to ‘nomad camps’ run by the local municipal authority. Just as in all *states of exception*, the law was suspended and officials took matters into their own hands.⁹⁹ The raping and killing of a woman could have easily been managed by the judicial system, however, by framing the argument that all Roma are predisposed to criminality and must all somehow be locked away, he created a problem which he could then be seen to actively solve, in the name of protecting the broader community. Fenced off areas allow for people to be monitored, so that they can be caught *before* committing a crime, hence the popular approval of Berlusconi’s decision.

NOMAD CAMP RULES

As the European Roma Rights Centre has noted, Italy is currently ‘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’.¹⁰⁰ According to research by the ERRC,¹⁰¹ there is restricted access inside the camps, with gatekeepers presiding over who goes in and out. This means that Roma are not allowed to bring visitors to their homes, and that their own freedom of movement is restricted, something which would be viewed by citizens as a violation of basic rights. Non-Romani parents usually do not allow their children to visit Romani friends in camps,¹⁰² something which further amplifies the children’s experience of segregation.

Drawing on Foucault’s discussion of biopolitics, we can see how authorised camps and emergency laws allow for individuals who demonstrate behaviour outside the expected role and duty of ‘the citizen’ to be bio-politicised. Examples of biopolitical control in nomad camps

⁹⁶ Vivaldi, "The Pursuit of "Happiness", " 56.

⁹⁷ The legislation was initially applied to the regions of Lombardy, Lazio and Campania, and later to Piemonte and Veneto. See Clough Marinaro and Daniele, "Roma and Humanitarianism in the Eternal City," 624.

⁹⁸ Picker, "Left Wing Progress? Neo-Nationalism and the Case of Romani Migrants in Italy," 5.

⁹⁹ Vivaldi, "The Pursuit of "Happiness", " 57.

¹⁰⁰ ERRC, "Campland: Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy," 17.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 20-2.

¹⁰² Ibid., 83.

include fingerprinting, 24 hour surveillance, curfews and round-the-clock policing. Police raids occur frequently in the camps, usually late at night or early in the morning, often with no warning.¹⁰³ When crimes in the region are committed, 'nomad camps' are usually the first place that police look, and Roma can be taken away to the police station and questioned without a warrant. The people inside live in makeshift barracks, containers or old trailers, sometimes with defective sewage systems and insufficient access to running water.¹⁰⁴ They are not necessarily provided with this housing, as often newcomers must move in with existing inhabitants until they can afford to buy their own caravan or build a shack. The ground is either covered in asphalt which gets extremely hot during summer, or just dirt which in the winter months turns to mud. Thus the 'makeshift' nature of their housing is not so different from their previous unofficial settlements, only that now they are concealed behind walls or fences, in a finite space, where their movement is restricted and they can be easily controlled.

The only benefit for the Roma is that they do not experience the constant threat of forced evictions, nor do they face attacks and persecution often experienced on the outside. They are no longer *on the run*, they are there to stay. For this reason the term 'camp' - a place erected for temporary residence - is as much of a misnomer as the term 'nomad'. These are sedentary people looking for a safe place to live, and these ghettos are their new *home* for an indefinite period of time.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁴ Clough Marinaro, "Between Surveillance and Exile: Biopolitics and the Roma in Italy," 278-9.

SEGREGATION POLICY REVISITED

As we can see from these case studies, the Italian government is repeating a policy it had five-hundred years ago, only this time with the Roma. There is a pattern that emerges prior to the creation of these policies. The ‘outgroup’ in each case exists in a peculiar limbo, because they are seen as threatening the homogeneity of the ‘norm’ desired by the state; in the first case Christianity, in the second case the ‘respectable citizen’. Yet neither could they simply be expelled, as this would have had detrimental consequences. While in the sixteenth century the Jews were necessary for economic survival, in modern times, states are bound by treaties such as the European Convention on Human Rights. Suddenly issuing an expulsion order for all Roma would be in violation of Italy’s international obligations. In each situation we see an immigration crisis, where a large influx of ‘problematic’ people sparked emergency laws that were intended to uphold the rule of law, be that religious law or citizenship responsibilities. It was feared in both cases that the minority group threatened the majority by their bad behaviour – the Papacy feared that Jews were a bad influence on Christians and might encourage apostasy, whereas the unruly living arrangements and mobile tendencies of the Roma embodied the opposite of what the government wants its people to become – sedentary citizens who engage in the housing market and the labour force in order to strengthen the economy and stability of the state. In both cases, since this ‘outgroup’ could neither be expelled nor integrated, it required the establishment of a special institution – a ‘zone of indistinction’ where they could be both included and excluded, and where the illegality of their deviant behaviour, violating the law of God and the laws of the state, could be brought back within the law through its explicit exclusion – *in a state of exception*.

The real reason Jews and Roma were viewed as threatening to the sovereign was disguised under a veil of prejudice and false stereotypes. In the same way that Jews were believed to be responsible for death and disease through their ritualistic murders and spiritual pollution, the Roma are blamed for crime and theft that supposedly stems from their deviant lifestyle. And so, in both of these situations, the public thought the government was protecting them by locking them away in correctional facilities where their behaviour could be controlled, when what it was really protecting was its own survival. In each instance sovereignty was in crisis – in the sixteenth century the Roman Catholic Church was under siege, whereas today it is the survival of the nation-state that is at threat from global mobility. An acute influx of social deviants at a critical time upset the system’s balance, and so the sovereign used drastic measures – emergency laws – to ensure social stability and control.

ANSWERING THE PUZZLE

Why weren't the Roma ghettoized in the sixteenth century, and why are they being ghettoized now? Whilst religion was the 'hot topic' of the early sixteenth century, mobility and migration is currently where the state is at its weakest, thus an internal "other" associated with nomadism constitutes today's paramount threat. Nomad camps are presented in discourse as being peculiar to a population predisposed not just to crime and theft, but also uncivilised living arrangements; something with which the Venetian Republic in the sixteenth century would not have been concerned. As argued by Foucault, it is only with the birth of the modern state that people's private lives have become state business.¹⁰⁵ In the sixteenth century, the Roma were both a smaller minority than the Jews, and they weren't associated with religion. They suffered a series of expulsions due to being seen as undesirable, but they were not seen as threatening to the stability of religious law and order, nor were they useful to the economy, so they did not exist in a peculiar limbo between inclusion and exclusion like the Jews.

Whilst the sovereign in the early modern period was still concerned with the spiritual salvation of its people, today the obsession is with how we live our lives. In Italy today, religious minorities such as Judaism do not threaten stability and social order, but the visual presence of a large group of people who establish their own communities in the form of unofficial settlements, and who do not engage with the housing market, the labour force, or even the bureaucracy of legal documentation, are not participating in today's *system*. They are defying what the nation-state sees as the responsibility of its citizens – to maintain normal, sedentary lives and to contribute to the economy and to strengthen the nation-state. In fact, in establishing their own communities outside bureaucratic control, they exist entirely beyond the reaches of biopolitics, defying what the nation-state sees as its responsibility to ensure the health, education and living standards of its subjects. To use an analogy from 'The Matrix', these people took the red pill, not the blue, and this throws sovereignty into crisis.

In *Means Without End*, Agamben argues that 'if the refugee represents such a disquieting element in the order of the nation-state, this is so primarily because by breaking the identity between the human and the citizen and that between nativity and nationality, it brings the original fiction of sovereignty to crisis'.¹⁰⁶ The Roma break this identity between human and citizen in two ways, firstly by being stateless or refugees, yet secondly by behaving like non-citizens even in situations when they are citizens. Issues such as social stigmatization, poverty, and a distrust of authority, lead them to choose informal settlements and the benefits of communal living within those settlements, over prison or a life on the streets – where most

¹⁰⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 119.

¹⁰⁶ *Means without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 20.

unemployed homeless people end up. They don't engage in citizenship responsibilities, nor do they need sovereign protection, as they have proved over the years that under all circumstances, if they stick together they will survive. For sovereignty to work there needs to be a social contract between a sovereign and its people, in which certain responsibilities are imposed in exchange for sovereign protection. Roma often do not engage in a social contract in which they agree to an arrangement of rights and responsibilities in exchange for state protection. It is not surprising, since in the past many have suffered state persecution rather than protection. Their presence, like the presence of refugees, shows that the sacred and inalienable rights of man, as ascribed in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789, are in reality citizenship rights,¹⁰⁷ and that the idea of 'human rights' – the notion that we have inherent rights granted to us for simply being human – is simply a fallacy. What ghettos, like refugee camps, ultimately highlight, is the incapacity of the nation-state system, or feudal system, or whatever system it may be, to accommodate certain people within its borders. This short-fall of the nation-state has already been discussed by Hannah Arendt, when she argued that the refugee crisis after the First World War demonstrated a weakness of the state structure as a political space.¹⁰⁸ Today, spaces outside the state, within the state, are still being constructed to accommodate non-citizens, just as they were to accommodate non-Christians in the early modern period.

THE APPEAL OF THE GHETTO

The argument above demonstrates why it was the Jews being segregated in the sixteenth-century, and why it is the Roma being segregated now. It does not, however, explain why specifically 'the ghetto' as an institution provides a solution to the problem of what must be done with social deviants that defy sovereign authority. Firstly, 'the ghetto' places people outside the rule of law within the law, through the creation of a *state of exception*. In sixteenth-century Venice it had been illegal for Jews to reside more than fifteen days per year in Venice because of the fear that they would taint the Christian community, but suddenly a mass influx of refugees arrived that were necessary to the survival of the economy, so the Venetian Republic created a territorial space in which they could live, that allowed for the law outside this space to be maintained. Just as in Agamben's 'camp paradigm', inside the ghetto the rule of law is suspended in order to uphold the law on the outside. In modern day Italy, at least over the past two decades, most nomad camps were created in response to public complaints, protests and riots regarding the existence of informal Romani settlements, or as a result of alleged Romani criminal acts. It is not

¹⁰⁷ *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 126.

¹⁰⁸ Hannah Arendt, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man," in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976).

the acts of Roma themselves, but rather the public backlash, which created violence outside the law – something that the law cannot handle. So, a territorial space was created in which the Roma were forcibly relocated – clearly a violation of their human rights – in order to uphold the rule of law on the outside. Thus, in both situations, the ghetto acts as a fictitious lacuna inside the state, created for the purpose of protecting law and order.

This confined territorial space allows for constant the surveillance of its inhabitants, something which ensures that they remain within this territorial confine, preventing them from breaking ghetto rules, and allowing them to be bio-politically controlled. In both situations a large wall or fence was constructed and guards were posted at the entrance to monitor their comings and goings. Inside, people were placed there indiscriminately, regardless of whether they were Marranos or Levantines, stateless or citizens, but rather according to whether or not they embodied that one characteristic that was seen as threatening to the state at the time – Judaism in the case of Jews, or mobility (i.e. lack of official housing) in the case of the Roma. Jews who converted to Christianity were allowed to live outside the ghetto, just as Roma who live in houses rather than unofficial settlements can live outside the camps. In both instances, curfews were imposed to ensure that these social deviants were locked away at night, supposedly protecting the safety of the broader community.

Finally, inside this ‘zone of indistinction’ is a place of legal ambiguity. Suspending the normal rule of law allows for new rules to be created according to the wishes of local authorities or the police, resulting in a diversity of procedures from ghetto to ghetto. In Venice, Jews were forced to practice usury with low interest rates and to manage pawn shops for the Christian needy in times of economic slump, whereas in Rome they served as doctors, musicians and financiers for the papacy. In nomad camps, during times of public instability, in order to be seen as actively controlling criminality, the police have the right to arrest people without a warrant and to conduct raids inside people’s homes at any hour. Inside ‘the ghetto’, the right to make decisions about one’s private life is disrespected through a blurring of distinction between what is public and what is private. Ghetto rules become ghetto law, or as put by Agamben, *law and fact become indistinguishable*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 170.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued that ‘nomad camps’ are reflective of a systemic problem. Many Roma, who for reasons beyond their control, are unable to access the housing and labour market. Hence, they find themselves outside the modern biopolitical system; and in some instances outside the law. This puts sovereignty, and therefore the nation-state into crisis. In Italy, an acute influx of Roma destabilised the system and caused public unrest, leading the Italian government to create a fictitious lacuna within the state, in order to incorporate Roma who live in unofficial settlements back into the system. This is not the first time Italy has witnessed the phenomenon of ‘the ghetto’. The Jews in the sixteenth century suffered a similar fate, because they could neither be included in, nor excluded from, the papal state. The difference between the two time periods was that Jews were perceived as threatening to a religious sovereign, whereas the Roma are perceived as threatening to the modern, secular, and biopolitical state. In each case, ghetto policy was sparked by a mass influx of the minority in question. The effect of ‘the ghetto’ on the inhabitants is the production of *bare life* – people who are abandoned by the law, lacking the rights normally attributed to citizenship, and for whom private life and public life are indistinguishable.

This thesis does not engage in problem-solving theory; rather, its purpose is to understand what is really happening in Italy today. All too often blame is placed upon the cultural traits of those who are segregated or socially excluded, when in fact the problem is systemic, and until the system changes, those who can’t be *made to live* will be *left to die*. As stated by Agamben, ‘we must seriously consider Arendt’s claim that the fates of human rights and the nation-state are bound together such that the decline and crisis of one necessarily implies the end of the other’.¹¹⁰ Whether nomad camp policy will reach the stage of all Roma being banned from living outside nomad camps, just as all Jews were banned outside the ghetto, is hard to say, and due to our modern sentiments about racial segregation, I do not think it is likely. But it is important to recognise what is happening in the process. One difference between these two minorities is that the Jews constituted a threat because of something that they were – Jewish, and they would have had to renounce their religion in order to escape the ghetto. The Roma in most instances are not nomadic, and many have houses, jobs, legal status, and live within the system. Those who have been given an opportunity to participate in the system may still suffer from stereotypes and prejudice, but they are not confined to the ghetto.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 134.

Whilst a breadth of historical work has been published on early modern Jewish ghettos, and much is currently being written on Roma segregation camps, both by academics and human rights activists, no attempt has previously been made to link the two, or to ask why Roma are confined to ghettos now and were not five hundred years ago. The one aspect of this thesis that has been previously explored is the application of Agamben's camp paradigm to Italy's nomad camps. However, the author had a rather different take on the subject. In his article *Campzenship: Reimagining the camp as a social and political space*,¹¹¹ Nando Sigona argues that Agamben's conceptualization of the camp does not account for the possibility of agency within the camp. He states that Agamben's theory has 'limited purchase for a sociological investigation of the complexity and ambivalence of social relations in and around camps as well as residents' everyday practices and experiences of political membership'.¹¹² Sigona then coins the term 'campzenship' to describe camp inhabitants' experiences of citizenship *within* the camp. As a result of fieldwork carried out over a period of ten years, he discovers that despite impoverished camp conditions, many Roma, after an initial period of shock, quickly adapt to camp life and feel a sense of safety and security on the inside compared to the prejudices they experience outside the camp.¹¹³ This may indeed be the case, but it does not take into account the political relationship between 'campzens' and the citizens of the state, which is exactly what Agamben seeks to conceptualize.

The ghetto, like the camp, is not a self-sufficient political terrain. Some historians have argued that the *Ghetto Novo* promoted cultural and political life by concentrating the Jewish community together,¹¹⁴ but there is a disjuncture between the way ghetto inhabitants relate to each other and the way they relate to the community outside. A sociological analysis of ghetto relations could only be undertaken within the realm of 'ghetto rules', not state law. And yes, agency exists, but what is significant is that inside the ghetto, in a *state of exception*, the inhabitants are abandoned by the law, thus subjected to fluctuating rules that apply to them. Citizenship rights do not exist – hence the quality of their life depends upon the whims of local officials. Thus, the argument that ghettos protect the inhabitants is a dangerous one to make. The ghetto is a black box in relation to the state in which it resides – a negative space outside the state, yet within the state, which highlights the incapacity of the nation-state system to accommodate certain people within its borders.

¹¹¹ Nando Sigona, "Campzenship: Reimagining the Camp as a Social and Political Space," *Citizenship Studies* 19, no. 1 (2015).

¹¹² Ibid., 1.

¹¹³ Ibid., 8-11.

¹¹⁴ David B. Ruderman, "The Cultural Significance of the Ghetto in Jewish History," (Central European University: Special Lecture, 27 January 2015).

In summary, Agamben's conceptualization of 'the camp' provides a framework with which we can understand the ghetto's relationship to the broader political community, and its development as a product of the changing nature of sovereign power. It must be remembered that to be confined to a ghetto is not a voluntary decision, regardless of any temporary advantage that may result for the inhabitants, and thus, the very existence of a ghetto denotes a vacuum of political agency, within which, we find an eclipse of the sacred and inalienable rights of man.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 126.

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