"Securitising the Roma, purifying Rome. The rhetoric of insecurity, urban decay and everyday practices of purification"

Dr. Ana Ivasiuc*

(*)Justus Liebig University, Giessen
Address: Rathenaustrasse 8, room 101
35394, Giessen, Germany
E-mail address: ana.ivasiuc@sowi.uni-giessen.de

Abstract

The recent migration of Roma from Eastern Europe has altered the urban landscape of large Italian cities through the proliferation of informal settlements, a *perpetuum mobile* of evacuations and ever-renewing practices of encampment in 'Nomad Camps'. The camps are constructed, on multiple axes, as places of pollution and infection requiring urgent and radical action. While the Roma have been portrayed as the 'inner enemy' (Sigona 2003), a 'threatening internal other' against whom non-Roma groups build community identities and a sense of unity (Clough Marinaro and Sigona 2011), the rhetoric of urban decay merges with prejudice against the Roma to construct the 'Nomad Camps' as securitised spaces of pollution threatening the local neighbourhoods on multiple levels. The enclosure of the camp, as a boundary around undesirable groups and their practices is, unsurprisingly, ineffective in combating the spill-over of the perceived pollution stemming from them. Drawing upon ethnographic research conducted in 2014 in the Eastern suburbs of Rome, I will analyse the rhetoric of urban degradation ('*degrado*') in Rome, arguing that various elements of this rhetoric contribute to the securitisation of the Roma, constructed as a threat. The physical anchorage of this diffuse threat, the 'Nomad Camp', is constructed as an enclosed, but permeable locus of dangerosity lurking in the neighbourhood and polluting the physical, human, economic and moral environment of the suburb. Further, I will detail the everyday practices of a group of suburban, middle class Romans organising night watches in their neighbourhood as an attempt to purify the suburban landscape and its community by combating the perceived immediate threats associated with the neighbouring camp, and, more abstractly, with urban decay. While claiming to produce security, in fact, their discourses and practices contribute to producing more insecurity.

Introduction

Whereas anti-Roma prejudice is often thought to be more or less constant in European societies, the last ten years have been the stage of a recrudescence of anti-Gypsyism (Stewart 2012) and of an increasing problematisation of the largest European minority in securitarian terms (van Baar 2015). In Italy, this discourse has found fertile soil at the imbrication between the anti-migration rhetoric and more deeply rooted anti-Roma sentiment (Picker 2012), in a wider context in which the securitisation of migration is articulated in neo-racist, culturalist idioms (Taguieff 1988; Balibar 1991; Cole 1997).

With the global multiplication of security discourses and practices signifying what has been coined „the rise of the security paradigm as a framework for organizing contemporary social life" (Goldstein 2010) and the naturalisation of security concerns, it appears essential to understand the particular meanings given to notions of security and the ways in which security practices shape these notions in localised contexts. This paper privileges – theoretically – a relational approach which attempts at uncovering the relations between „security" and other concepts, as well as – empirically – „an approach by the practices" (Bigo 2014). Its aim is to contribute to broadening the knowledge regarding the ways in which (in)security[1] is generated, by focusing on understanding the „practical reason and the historicity of [different actors'] actions" (Bigo 2014). I argue, in a constructivist manner, that insecurity is subjectively and socially produced through a series of everyday practices revolving around localised concerns, the spread and subsequent transformations of certain discourses and the dissemination and interpretation of powerful visuals circulating in the (social) media. In light of securitisation

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[1] By speaking of (in)security as security interwoven with insecurity, I wish to convey the idea that the two concepts are interrelated, to the point of being inseparable. As Wæver (1995:56) notes on the salience of insecurity from discourses on security, „*if one has such complete security, one does not label it security*". An appropriate metaphor, commonly used to conceptualise the security/insecurity continuum is a Möbius ribbon (Bigo 2001).

theory revolving around the successful designation of threat, and in particular given the shortcomings of the Copenhagen School approach (McDonald 2008), I contend that localised ethnographies on the cultural construction of danger can offer more satisfying answers to the question of „why particular representations of threat resonate with particular communities" (McDonald 2008:564) and have the merit to „de-familiarise" security and insecurity by exploring different vantage points (Maguire et al 2014:10).

In light of the Roma migration issue being first and foremost an urban issue (Legros and Vitale 2011:3), it appears all the more necessary to intersect research on Roma and the urban problematique in localised contexts, to uncover how and why the Roma are subjected to securitarian discourses and practices. I will attempt to show how the anti-Roma rhetoric and the emerging grassroots security practices it favours are embedded in a wider social context of concern for urban decay at the material, visible level, and for social and moral decay at the symbolic level. The ensuing attempts at purifying the urban space are sustained and fed by cultural norms and local specificities, and in turn underlie the creation of particular structures which institutionalise and further reinforce the imbrications between the security rhetoric, anti-Roma sentiment and the discourse on decay.

The paper's argument unfolds in three moves. I will start by the ethnographic account of the practices of vigilantism of a group of inhabitants of the Eastern Roman neighbourhood of Nuova Ponte di Nona. Then, I will discuss how these (in)security practices are intimately linked with the perception of decay, both in its material form embedded in urban decor and perceived through visual clues of „matter out of place" (Douglas 1991[1966]) and in its symbolic form of moral decay, as an existential threat to the nation. Finally, I will analyse how the *campo nomadi*, is perceived and constructed as a polluted and polluting enclosure demanding purification and will propose the reading of securitarian practices revolving around the camp as forms of purification rituals. In the concluding section I will discuss some theoretical implications of the ethnographic

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account on vigilantes (in)security practices in relation to the concepts of (in)security and purity in the urban setting.

„Sheriffs of the night" and the performance of (in)security

On the 13th of May 2015, the internet news platform „Roma Today" published an article called *„Sheriffs of the night"*[2]. The title provoked some discontent among the readers: *„These are not sheriffs but desperate people left to themselves among prostitutes, drug dealers, thieves and probable rapists... it's an outrage to have to defend oneself while paying 70% in taxes"*[3]. The article refers to a group of citizens from Nuova Ponte di Nona, in the Eastern periphery of Rome, who, under the name of CAOP (*Coordinamento Azioni Operative Ponte di Nona*), organise night watch patrols in their neighbourhood. Since the beginning of their activity, when they only had three cars involved in patrolling, they have increased the number of cars to ten and have expanded their activity to two other Eastern neighbourhoods of Rome, Colle degli Abeti and Corcolle. Their threefold expansion has only happened recently, in the span of four to six months.

Levels of criminality in Nuova Ponte di Nona are not higher than the usual levels found in the Roman periphery. Many inhabitants, as well as the members of the official neighbourhood committee[4] (*Comitato di Quartiere Nuova Ponte di Nona*) underline that despite the image which has been constructed in the press[5], the neighbourhood is *„far from being the Bronx"*. Some of the inhabitants aware of the existence of the night watch

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[2] http://torri.romatoday.it/ponte-di-nona/ronde-ponte-di-nona-tour.html, retrieved May 14th, 2015.

[3] Comment by Claudio, 13 May 2015, own translation.

[4] Neighbourhood committees (*Comitato di quartiere*) are structures set in place as forms of citizen participation at the local level.

[5] The image of insecurity built in the press is partly attributable to the vigilantes themselves, who appear often in the local media and feed often ambiguous photographs to journalists covering petty crime in the neighbourhood.

patrols shake their heads in disagreement with the practice of the CAOP, whom they see as an abnormality which should not exist in a well functioning state. But, many continue, the absence of the state, manifested in the carelessness and negligence of institutions (*menefreghismo*) drives citizens to take action in their own hands, a narrative creating space for progressive acceptance and legitimisation for vigilante practices.

The Italian word generally used for neighbourhood watch patrols is *ronde*. Since the word recalls the fascist patrols, tends to have negative overtones and represents a socially contested practice, the group insists that their activity should not be labeled as such. They argue that the crucial differences between what they do – „surveillance" (*vigilanza*) – and the *ronde* are that they do not carry weapons and refrain from engaging in violent acts. Instead, they patrol the territory and report to the police any suspect activity; if they observe a crime being perpetrated, they alert the police and subsequently wait for the arrival of the officers, without putting themselves at danger by undertaking action. However, the refutation of the label *ronde* for their neighbourhood watch patrols is a change of tactic rather than a well-thought choice from the beginning: in the wake of the first patrol in March 2013, the initiator of the group wrote for the special issue on security of the magazine of the neighbourhood, an article called „*Ronde pontenonine*", thus unequivocally appropriating the term. Currently, however, the group contests the term on a regular basis and argues with insistence that their practices should not be perceived as *ronde*. The topic emerges also in internal discussions, when members co-produce the meaning of *ronde* through the construction of boundaries between what they do and what would characterise the „real" *ronde*. They prefer to present themselves as active and concerned citizens who mobilised, in support of the forces of order, for the surveillance of a crime-ridden neighbourhood and the protection of its exasperated inhabitants.

Out of the twelve members of the group, two are women, but they participate less often in patrols. Oftentimes mention is made of women being vulnerable to rapists and attackers, and several times I heard from men the trope of women self-imposing a

curfew after eight o'clock in the evening[6]. When insecurity is described in the neighbourhood, it tends to be exemplified by crimes perpetrated against women; the figure of the elderly woman resurfaces often as epitome of vulnerability. At the level of practices, the CAOP offers women who come back home at late hours to accompany them from the moment they enter the neighbourhood until they are safe in their homes. While I have not been able to witness such a service being offered during my fieldwork, while accompanying the group on its night watch patrols, it occurred several times that women stopped to express gratitude for „keeping an eye on the neighbourhood". One of them gave them tips as to a suspect car which she had been able to observe a few nights before. These interactions suggest a complex gender dimension, in which, through their portrayal as fragile humans overexposed to crime, women are instrumentalised in the production of insecurity but can also play more ambiguous roles, such as the women involved in the group and the supportive bystanders.

The group is institutionalised as a non-governmental organisation and has developed its own logo: in the middle of the initials displayed horizontally, a green and black target. Both the logo and the name of the group remind of militaristic terms of combat. The logo is displayed clearly on the front side doors of the cars used for the night patrols, as a sign of warning whose audience is threefold: the possible delinquents, for whom the logo is intended as a form of discouragement, the other inhabitants of the neighbourhood, whom they wish to reassure, and the law enforcement institutions, with whom the CAOP leader says they have a continuous and close cooperation[7]. The clear

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[6] When women mention this trope, they refer mostly to the elderly, male or female, signaling, alongside the use of a diffuse „we" as victims, a distribution of vulnerability uncovering unequal power relations within the imagined homogeneous community.

[7] To the point, he explains, that they coordinate each night with regards to the number of cars involved in patrolling the neighbourhood: „*If we have one car, they put two to patrol the neighbourhood; if we have two cars on a given night, they only put one of their patrolling cars*". During my fieldwork, however, I have not been able to observe directly such coordination, although in one instance a member of the CAOP

display of the logo on the cars is part of the performance of security which they enact during the night watch patrols. There has been, however, an evolution in the visual performance related to the display of the logo, from a more explicit version, with bigger letters and the target explicitly depicted in the middle of the initials, to a more discreet version, with smaller letters, in black and white and without the central target[8]. Not so coincidentally perhaps, this reduction of visibility and explicitness of the logo has occurred while the discourse of the vigilantes has radicalised, presaging a passage from the enactment of night watch patrols as performance to possibly more violent forms of vigilantism yet to come. The group discusses regularly tactics of going undercover in order to effectively catch at least „one of them", in the idea of „teaching him a lesson so the others would get scared". „Lynching" emerged in discussions as something that was deemed entirely possible to happen, given the „exasperation of people around here".

My first contact with the leader of the organisation took place in November 2014, when I asked for an interview regarding his perception of security issues in the neighbourhood. Given his positive reaction, I pushed my luck and asked if I could accompany them that night: the preliminary fieldwork period was coming to an end and I needed to be quick. Again, the reaction was positive (it is during that particular time, as I will understand later, that the CAOP seeks publicity and takes every opportunity to mediatise its activity[9]). During the phone conversation, I noted how the word „security"

mentioned that he did ask the Italian military police (*carabinieri*) to reinforce the control on a particular night.

[8] The leader explains that this evolution was spurred by internal debates on the issue, as well as suggestions from the law enforcement institutions, in order to avoid putting themselves at risk and constitute visible targets for criminal groups.

[9] In November 2014, only one video material, 13 minutes long, was available on the Internet regarding the activity of the CAOP (https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=27&v=EPQ59R0lopk, retrieved June 12th 2015). As I write my paper, there are at least four journalistic video materials either disseminated or in preparation, among which a full documentary. Also, the CAOP and in particular its leader are increasingly

was uttered profusely, not only while explaining the activity of the group, but also in regards to me and to how I was going to be in a total state of security if, during the night watch patrol, I was going to accompany the leader in his own car. Quite unequivocally, I was involved since our first telephone contact in a performance of security.

But in order for the performance of security to be credible, a performance of *insecurity* was also necessary to serve as legitimation for their activity. The audience had to be convinced that, despite their continuous patrolling, the neighbourhood was unsafe and hence their service was desperately needed and their planned expansion justified. Since it was not certain that during my presence any criminal would be caught *in flagrante*, insecurity had to be enacted and performed differently, but unequivocally, lest I conclude that their mobilisation was unnecessary and the result of a rich imagination rather than a pressing reality. Hence, the appearance of the neighbourhood as a safe space had to be replaced by a scene of insecurity, carefully composed for my benefit since the first minutes of the patrol, when the leader explained that he would take me to a few particular places, to *show* me some things, deviating the usual trajectory of the patrol to include what I deciphered as visual landmarks of insecurity. For a great deal of the night, I was shown *what insecurity looks like*.

I embarked thus on a performance recalling the touristic tours of Rome, on precise, seemingly planned trajectories punctuated by attractions worth stopping for and contemplating. This time, they weren't historic monuments or pretty sights, but a collection of matter, people and practices out of place. I was shown several landmarks on the route. The first sight, within the first fifteen minutes of the patrol, was a broken fence separating vacant land from a street with middle-class blocks of flats. The broken fence, they argued, was offering thieves easy access to the nearby houses, whose inhabitants had installed bars at the windows to the point that the buildings „*looked like a prison*":

visible in the media landscape, both local and national (regular TV appearances, as well as articles in the daily extreme right wing newspaper *Il Tempo*).

„*You can imagine how people live here*", suggesting a perpetual state of fear. The second stop was an unauthorised dump[10] (*discarica abusiva*), a heap of waste disposed on an empty parking lot. The derelict objects lying around (an old one-person mattress, used clothes, plastic bags of waste, some of which were broken, with refuse spilling out of them) were the sign of incivility (*inciviltà*, as disrespect for basic rules of convivence) and the social discomfort (*disagio sociale*) haunting the neighbourhood, but also of the neglect and carelessness of the authorities, which had abandoned the city to itself. The third sight was an intersection in which two sex workers were waiting for clients, a practice perceived as morally and legally out of place, and, moreover, enacted by immigrant – thus out of place – women[11]. The landscape in which this scene was taking place was a space of surrounding vacant land penetrated by roads whose sidewalks had been overrun by nearly human size greenery. The sight was thus the epitome of an urban and moral landscape gone awfully amiss, where nothing and no one was in the right place: humans on the roads instead of sidewalks, greenery on the sidewalks instead of spaces for domesticated nature, women displaced from their countries, but also embodying symbolic forms of displacement: the estrangement of the women's bodies for cash, the morals of their clients gone astray.

When I returned to Rome for more fieldwork, in May 2015, I was taken again to see a visual performance of insecurity. I was warned that it would be „*something which [I] had never seen before, an unimaginable view*". I was taken to observe the parking lots of a visibly poorer area of the neighbourhood (which was not watched with the same fervour as other, visibly richer parts of the neighbourhood). The scene was a group of five

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[10] Images of waste dumps on inappropriate places are also often displayed on social media by the group.

[11] The leitmotiv of prostitution practiced by immigrant women in the Eastern periphery of Rome resurfaced during several discussions with inhabitants of these neighbourhoods. What was deplored in the first place was the proximity at which these practices were allegedly taking place, entailing the risk of moral contagion for an innocent but dangerously corruptible youth: „*What will the young boys think when they see these women doing this practically under their windows?*"

or six cars with various missing parts, rusting and abandoned in the parking space of the blocks of flats. The incompleteness, but also the misplacement of those cars which manifestly did not belong in a parking lot, were constituted to be signs of insecurity. The explanation behind the presence of those broken cars was ambiguous: the missing parts had been stolen (most likely, as I was told, by Roma); but there was also responsibility on the side of the inhabitants of those apartments, who obviously neglected both their unkempt looking blocks of flats and their parking lots, since they could leave their cars in such a state. They were not very diligent people, I was told.

The visual construction of insecurity diminished within the economy of the performance after we heard an alarm coming from an apartment. The sound of the alarm substituted the auditive to the visual; the ominous sound constructed the space as unsafe to an extent which was manifestly judged sufficient, since the rest of the patrol did not involve „visiting" other visuals of insecurity. The sound of the alarm had been proof enough that the neighbourhood was unsafe, even though it appeared to have been accidentally triggered and did not, in fact, signal criminal activities. The interposition of the auditive in the visual performance foreshadows multisensorial constructions of insecurity, beyond the ocularcentrism criticised by sensorial anthropologists (Howes 1991 and 2005; Classen 2005; Grasseni 2007).

The invitation to *see* for myself the *raison d'être* of their mobilisation exposed the visual signs which they constructed as signifiers of insecurity legitimising their activity. These signifiers had much to do with the discourse which I would repeatedly hear in the Eastern periphery of Rome during my fieldwork: decay.

„The humus of illegality": decay and danger

The issue of the *ronde* comes back periodically, not only in the local (social) media of the neighbourhood, but also in municipality politics. At the end of April 2015, the new prefect of Rome, Franco Gabrielli, declared:

> *I am allergic to* ronde*. It's a case of confusing roles. In a truly democratic State, citizens delegate the use of force to institutions, or else it becomes the Far West. We don't need sheriffs, but more street sweepers and people who reappropriate the territory. Decay is the humus of illegality[12].*

The theme of urban decay (*degrado*), a word which resurfaces stubbornly in everyday conversations, as well as in more articulated political critique, refers to a set of visual signifiers of neglect and *inciviltà* in the management of urban space, ranging from graffiti inscriptions, poster displays, the destruction or deterioration of objects of urban decor to the uncontrolled growth of greenery in spaces deemed inappropriate for it and the inefficient collecting and treatment of waste. It is not, in fact, the large scale decay signifying de-industrialisation and the abandonment of large buildings. Rather, this decay is constituted by a multitude of small details on the urban scene.

On the topic of *degrado*, the new prefect, declared opponent of the *ronde*, and the leader of the CAOP, initiator of the patrols, would agree: according to the latter, „*decay, naturally, brings decay*"[13], signalling the perceived propensity of decay to reproduce itself uncontrollably and the conflation of the material, social and symbolic layers within the polysemy of decay: urban decay (visible in the material disorder and decomposition of urban decor, due to public neglect and the inobservance of social rules)

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[12] Source:

http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2015/04/29/news/il_prefetto_gabrielli_a_tor_bella_monaca_sono_allergico_alle_ronde_e_basta_roghi_tossici_nei_campi_rom_-113136096/ retrieved May 15th 2015, own translation.

[13] Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3uU98Oq9TQ retrieved April 15th 2015 (*min. 0:44*).

brings social decay (criminality and insecurity, a consequence of the perceived absence of public security institutions), as well as symbolic decay (the disappearance of *civiltà* as core value of Romans[14], presaged by the disappearance of the vulnerable nation invaded by immigrants and „nomads"[15]). Decay, thus, becomes a container for a multiplicity of sores, from the urban eye sores of disorder to the moral sores of incivility, illegality and criminality. On the facebook page of the group, one can find, alongside comments on decay, depictions of what is perceived as repulsive human activity misplaced in the urban landscape: a presumably homeless person washing his body at a public fountain in the historical centre of the city, another one defecating on the side of a sidewalk: signifiers of a dramatic decadence of Rome from being the European cradle of civilisation to an uncontrolled space of *inciviltà*.

The overlap of urban decay and insecurity comes also forth in recent institutional arragements, which make visible the transformations of security concerns in local politics and policies. If during the first mandate of the Veltroni administration (2001-2006), security concerns were handled by a separate department (*Assessorato alla sicurezza*), in its second mandate (2006-2008), the municipality ostensibly downplayed the topic, relegating security issues to the department „Youth policies, relations with universities

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[14] The value of *civiltà* is symbolically traceable back to the centrality of the Roman Empire in „civilising" its conquested territories. In fact, Rome as *Caput Mundi* is a motive often mobilised in the rhetoric of decay as a measure of the decadence through which the city has gone from its initial glory. In the context of Rome, Michael Herzfeld (2009:31) notes how the ideal of *civiltà* has been instrumentalised to exclude the unwanted, especially the Roma. In mirror, Piasere (2005[1991]:140-141) recalls the ways in which the Roma have been represented on a lower evolutionary grade in comparison to the non-Roma and how it was thought that their levels of *civiltà*, „stagnant for centuries" and „in crisis" must be brought to „levels comparable to ours".

[15] That the presence of immigrants and especially „nomads" puts at danger the value of *civiltà* is formulated by the leader of the CAOP explaining the reasons behind his anti-Roma agenda: „this riffraff is too far away from the culture of *civiltà* which is ours" (*questa gentaglia è troppo lontana dalla cultura della civiltà che è la nostra*).

and security"; the Alemanno administration (2008-2013) returns to a concept of security close to public order and adjoins the combat of urban decay to security issues (Battistelli and Lucianetti 2010:99-100), highlighting how a plurality of meanings of disorder come to be constituted as a threat in the urban space. The proliferation of departments dedicated to security *and* urban decor (*sicurezza e decoro urbano*) within Italian municipalities, as well as of distinct bodies within local police with a double mandate of maintaining the public and visual order, reveal the articulations of public order and security emergent in the junction of insecurity and decay.

In an attempt to rescue the „valuable areas of the historic centre" from decay, in 2012, within the third „Pact for a safe Rome" (*Patto per Roma sicura*), the Alemanno administration passed a decree[16] prohibiting „camping" or settling on benches, as well as drinking and eating in the historic centre, destined exclusively for the „visual fruition of monumental and architectonic perspectives"[17]. Enacted from within a securitarian frame, these measures attest to the intertwining of security with a particular vision of urban aesthetics, purified of the visual signifiers of *degrado*, not only in their material form, but also with regards to the human categories it came to symbolise: the regulations of urban space aim at the obliteration of the presence of undesirables as signifiers of social decay.

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[16] The decree, dated October 1st 2012, called „Urgent dispositions to guarantee the protection of the valuable areas of the historic centre" („*Disposizioni urgenti per garantire la tutela delle aree di pregio del centro storico*") is available at
http://www.comune.roma.it/PCR/resources/cms/documents/ordinanza_anti_bivacco_ottobre_2012.pdf, retrieved June 8th 2015.

[17] The delegate of the municipality in matters of security commented for the press that the initiative goes together with „a growingly careful and incisive control of the territory on behalf of the Police of Rome and of the other forces of order in the field of the third pact for a safe Rome" („*un sempre più attento e incisivo controllo del territorio da parte della Polizia Roma Capitale e delle altre Forze dell'ordine nell'ambito del Terzo Patto per Roma Sicura*"). Source: http://www.romacapitalenews.com/decoro-nuova-ordinanza-anti-bivacco-per-tutela-centro-e-sicurezza-48235/#sthash.Eex07umS.dpuf retrieved June 8th 2015.

The obsession of decay in the case of Nuova Ponte di Nona must also be placed in the context of its urbanistic failure. A new neighbourhood, whose construction started in 2002 as a result of deals between the leftist municipality and real estate developers[18], Nuova Ponte di Nona embodied the promise of a suburban, bourgeois neighbourhood, placed in the middle of nature but well linked to the centre of Rome. Instead of delivering its promise of a „future centrality" in the spatial economy of the capital city (Scandurra 2012), the urban planning around Nuova Ponte di Nona created an alienating landscape where the only (non-)place (Augé 1995) of vague, inorganic sociability is the food court within the commercial mall of Roma Est, built in 2007.

Some inhabitants complain about the decrease of the value of their real estate acquisitions in the neighbourhood; the leader of the vigilantes group is well placed to know it: he administers a condominium in the neighbourhood. Entire blocks of flats have remained unsold and have been the object of sporadic practices of squatting. In 2013, the movement for the right to housing „Action" has occupied over fifty empty apartments in a building of via Cerruti, but has subsequently been evicted. Interestingly, the discourses of the squatters, as well as the ones of *Pontenonini* opposing the occupation, were also constructed around *degrado*. While inhabitants expressed fears that the occupation would increase the *degrado* of the neighbourhood, the squatters maintained precisely the contrary: occupying empty apartments automatically stops their physical decay. Nevertheless, many *Pontenonini* seem to share consensus: occupations of empty buildings are damaging the neighbourhood, reflecting (neo)liberal attitudes to the sanctity of property even while deploring the insufficiency of housing for poorer Italians and the passivity of authorities in solving the issue. That citizens faced with pressing

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[18] The neighbourhood was built by a group pertaining to Francesco Caltagirone, a real estate and construction mogul whose name was given to the central street of the neighbourhood. Some respondents did not hold him in great esteem, hinting at *mafioso* type links. The centrality of his name in the neighbourhood avows the embeddedness of ideas on the inevitability of corruption in Rome (see also Herzfeld 2009).

housing needs may also „take things in their own hands" does not reach the same levels of legitimacy as citizen mobilisation for the surveillance of the neighbourhood.

The rhetoric of *degrado* is often associated with and apotheotically signified in the description of urban landscape as „no man's land" (*terra di nessuno*), hence as a territory inviting for a collective reconquest. For the prefect of Rome, just like for the vigilantes, decay means insecurity. And like them, he conflates the material and symbolic semantic layers of decay, advocating, instead of *ronde*, for more street sweepers and a reappropriation of the territory[19], accrediting thus the connection between *degrado* and insecurity.

The discourse on decay appears thus as source of insecurity mediated visually by elements of the urban space pertaining to the register of disorder: broken, incomplete or decomposing objects, heaps of waste, misplaced greenery, in short, „matter out of place" (Douglas 1991[1966]). The link between decay, its translation in the idiom of insecurity and the ensuing attempts at (re)establishing order is mediated by anthropological understandings of disorder: „*though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power*" (Douglas 2001[1966]:96).

The construction of the Roma as sources of danger is intimately linked with the discourse on disorder. In the representations – visual and discursive – which circulate on the Roma, the semantic fields related to filth are privileged. The association perceived between the Roma and filth is stressed and almost ritually reminded during conversations

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[19] To this particular perceived collective need of reappropriation of the space through cleansing responds an institutionalised practice of volunteering for collective sessions of urban clean-up significantly called „retake". According to its website, the mission of the „retake" movement is to „combat decay, to valorise the common goods and to disseminate civic sense"; a „retaker" is defined as „any citizen who actively participates in the recovery of public spaces and goods which find themselves in a state of decay". Source: www.retakeroma.com, retrieved June 21, 2015.

about the topic, accompanied by demarcations expressed through incomprehension: how can they live like this? Filth is constructed to be the environment in which the Roma live by culture, through which they become contagious and dangerous - „an unclean people" (*popolo immondo*) (Piasere 2005[1991]:160)[20].

At the nexus between discourses on the perceived criminality of the Roma and the squalor constructed to be part of a culturalised lifestyle, much discussion goes on about the practice of rooting through rubbish containers, largely attributed to the Roma and the homeless. In 2008, during an extraordinary council meeting on *security*[21], the Alemanno administration proposed an anti-rooting ordinance (*ordinanza anti-rovistaggio*) to criminalise the practice. At the time, the third sector blocked the proposal, but at present, several *Comitati di quartiere* from Rome, mostly under the banner of populist right wing *Alleanza Nazionale – Fratelli d'Italia*, are petitioning for the introduction of such regulations. In 2013, Codacons, the organisation for the protection of consumers, filed a complaint to the Public Prosecutor and a letter of formal notice to the Municipality on the topic of rooting[22]. Coining the practice „an unacceptable form of decay" (suggesting that other forms may perhaps be deemed more acceptable), the association posits that, beyond the „sanitary risks" it entails, the practice could take the form of more serious criminal offences when viewed under the angle of the violation of personal data and of property theft (since the refuse is considered property of the Municipality). In Ponte di

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[20] In his book „Popoli delle discariche" (Peoples of landfills), Piasere explores how the Roma have been constituted as „itinerant landfill", „people with a high potential of dejection", while being systematically confined to spaces situated in the proximity of landfills (Piasere 2005[1991]:160-161). Also, he quotes Kenrick and Puxon, who suggest that the image of filthiness in relation to the Roma is simultaneously the most common and the least contested of all stereotypes.

[21] *La Repubblica*, August 6th 2008. Roma, è polemica su Alemanno. 'Divieto di rovistare nei cassonetti'. Source:http://www.repubblica.it/2008/07/sezioni/cronaca/sicurezza-politica-12/alemanno-cassonetti/alemanno-cassonetti.html, retrieved June 23rd 2015.

[22] Povertà, Codacons: chi fruga nei cassonetti commette reato. Source: www.codacons.it retrieved June 23rd 2015.

Nona, the most expressed concerns regarding the practice are less alarmist: it's more about the disorder which is left around the containers after the passage of those who root through them, and the repugnant scene of people touching rubbish[23].

The *campo nomadi* as personifier of decay and rituals of purification

Within pro-Roma activism, Italy is sometimes referred to as „Campland" (ERRC 2000) in reference to the existence of *campi nomadi*, enclosed spaces destined as housing solutions for Roma groups perceived as nomadic. This Orientalistic imaginary has deep and dramatic consequences for the politics and policies of control of Roma groups; however, despite the oft affirmed uniqueness, the Italian case is far from being a historical singularity in Europe. The emergence of the first camps[24] can be traced back to the mid-sixties and predominantly in the centre and North of Italy (Piasere 2006:10), as a result of non-Roma lobbyists who wanted to copy the French and British models of the equipped transit camps for nomads, on recommendations of the Council of Europe regarding measures to protect the „Gypsy culture".

The lack of other housing opportunities brought together against their will rival families who were exposed to the „reserve effect" (Piasere 2005[1991]:183): the first arrived took control of the space and „privatised" it, leading to factionalisation and the multiplication of conflicts. In the seventies, the Italian Roma and Sinti gradually deserted the conflict-ridden camps, which started hosting successive waves of Xoraxane Roma from Yugoslavia. These groups were engaged in a migration project misconstructed by non-Roma as nomadism, an exoticising imaginary at the root of the adoption, between

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[23] Suggesting a haptic dimension to the construction of objects of insecurity.

[24] Piasere suggests that the camps, as specific spatial forms, emerged in the 19th century colonies. Calling for a wider perspective on camps, he argues that the camp has become the fourth pillar of modernity, together with the state-nation-territory trinity (Piasere 2006:12).

1985 and 1995, of a series of laws and regulations regarding the establishment of camps as a measure to protect the „nomadic culture", perceived, against all evidence, as the particularity of the Roma (Colacicchi 2008:39)[25].

The establishment of camps as management instruments for the Roma accompanies the advancement of „securitarian neoliberalism" (Bietlot 2005), the „global spread of (…) the state of exception" as suspension of rights legitimised by security discourses (Agamben 2005), and the shift from a model of inclusive community, infused with the ideals of the social state, to a model of exclusive state, underscored by concerns of criminality control (Piasere 2006:11). The camps act as a tool for purifying the city of its undesirables, progressively pushed outside of urban space in a movement of „degypsification of the Roman *Urbs*" (Bermann and Clough Marinaro 2011); within these spaces, the Roma could be normalised, sanitised and perfected through humanitarian and development interventions.

The inhabitants of camps become a particular figure – „*campizens*"[26] – de-nationalised and hyperculturalised, they are not citizens, but also not non-citizens (Piasere 2006:14) – a figure betwixt and between, whose belongingness to the territory is problematised and constructed in opposition to the naturalised attachment of the non-Roma to land. The anti-Roma discourse in Italy is strengthened by the ambiguity of the presupposed nomadism of the Roma (Sigona 2002), understood as cultural choice and signifying the pre-modernity of the Roma and their unproductiveness (Piasere, quoted in Hepworth 2012). Pollution taboos may help explaining the aura of dangerousness assigned to the Roma, labeled as nomads in a culture in which belonging to a place is

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[25] In this sense, the camps have been seen as instruments through which the cross-fertilisation of labelling and policies tends to transform the Roma from „nomads" to nomads (Sigona 2003 and 2005), contributing to imposing a collective, stereotyped identity through the work of the politics of categories from above (Picker 2008).

[26] A calque of Piasere's „*campodini*", as opposed to „*citadini*" (citizens) as inhabitants of the city.

valued in daily sociality and identity constructions. Through the analysis of the categories of „abomination" proscribed as taboos, Mary Douglas (1991[1966]:41-56) shows that the impure (thus dangerous) elements are the ones which have heterogeneous characteristics problematising their belonging to one or another category. Thus, the ones who „call themselves nomads, but aren't that nomadic" (*si chiamano nomadi, ma tanto nomadi non sono*) fall outside the sedentary without „properly" entering the nomad category, since they do not move away from the camps[27], thus engendering the „hazy and incoherent category of ‚nomads'" (Picker 2012). Far from being a simple misunderstanding about the presupposed nomadism of the Roma, the rejection of this group can be interpreted as being rooted in pollution beliefs isolating elements which do not conform to certain ideas of order as belonging to a space and to a community of rules of sociability (the culture of the *civiltà*).

The declaration of the Nomad Emergency in 2008 can be read as a successful securitising move, as theorised by the Copenhagen School: a speech act through which a threat is socially constructed and an issue is taken out of the realm of politics as usual (Wæver 1995; Buzan et al. 1998). The state of emergency was related to the perceived uncontrollability and alarming criminality of Roma groups; rather than producing reassurance, the discourses around the Nomad Emergency fueled social hostility, configuring security needs and demands which drove the exclusion of the Roma even further (Costi 2010). The emergency granted more power to prefects from Rome, Milan and Naples and a specific budget to undertake security measures in the management of Roma groups. The measures undertaken aimed at the camps as producers of insecurity

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[27] The practices of management of the Roma in Italy can be understood as attempts to „normalise" the group by forcing it into one category or another. While the discourse advocating for the „sedentarisation" of the Roma (as well as the practices it circumscribes within development interventions) predominate, the tendency to „nomadise" the Roma entirely is embodied not only in the practice of evictions, but also in a more recent slogan of the populist, xenophobic *Alleanza Nazionale – Fratelli d'Italia*: „*Se sei nomade, devi nomadare*" (If you are a nomad, you have to „nomadise").

and most often related to the intensification of surveillance around authorised camps[28] and the eviction of informal settlements (labeled „abusive camps").

In Rome, the politics of eviction of informal settlements initiated by the Alemanno administration in the wake of the declaration of the Nomad Emergency contributed to the overcrowding of the authorised camps and the exacerbation of internal conflicts. It did not take long before tensions intensified also between the inhabitants of camps and their non-Roma neighbours. In Tor Sapienza, for instance, some of the respondents claimed that when the camp in Via Salviati was less crowded, its presence did not seem to create as much popular discontent as now[29].

After evictions of unauthorised camps, the areas are always reported to be „cleaned up and made safe" (subjected to *bonifica e messa in sicurezza*), an expression whose rigidity suggests ritualistic overtones, revealing cleansing as a ritual of urban purification. *Bonifica* refers to three material meanings and a symbolic one. The material meanings refer to the clean-up of either paludic soils or of contaminated, polluted land, generally in order to render it productive and inhabitable to humans; the removal of

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[28] The multiplication of surveillance cameras and security personnel engaged in policies enacted within the context of the Nomad Emergency opens up the analysis of commercial security practices (Leander 2010), an aspect (to my knowledge) insufficiently approached in academic debates around the management of the Roma in Italy. The Mafia Capitale scandal, erupted in November 2014 and related to the preferential attribution of contracts for the management of immigrants and the Roma, can be a fertile empiric field for the analysis of links between emergency policies and commercial profit-making.

[29] The camp in Via Salviati is much more engrained into the urban space of the neighbourhood of Tor Sapienza than the camp in Via di Salone with regards to Nuova Ponte di Nona. The presence of the Roma in the neighbourhood is also much more visible; interactions between the inhabitants of the camp and their neighbours occur more often, hinting at existing forms of sociality beyond the anti-Roma discourse. Perhaps these interactions can partly suggest why Tor Sapienza is currently not the scene of vigilante practices, despite the contribution of the *Comitato di Quartiere* to construct the camp as a dangerous space and its support to the anti-Roma agenda of the CAOP.

mines, unexploded bombs or projectiles from a previous battle field[30]; the disinfection and disinfestation of either persons carrying infectious diseases or areas thought of being dangerous to human health; when it refers to land, *bonifica* has the connotation of reclaiming the territory. The symbolic meaning refers to „undertaking direct action to eliminate something considered unhealthy and harmful for social customs and contrary to the values generally accepted"[31]. I believe that in fact, all these meanings are contained in the operation of *bonifica* to which former camp areas are subjected: through the *bonifica*, the space is again made safe for human use and free of infection and danger, including the moral dangers associated with the presence of a group whose culture is perceived „too far away from our culture of *civiltà*".

Environmental concerns and tropes have also permeated the construction of the campi nomadi as dangerous spaces. A recent discourse which gained momentum after the declaration of the nomad emergency stresses how the camps pollute the environment through the practice of burning refuse, intensified in the last years[32]. The camps are metaphorically referred to as „land of fires" (*terra dei fuochi*[33]) and as sources of dioxin which poisons the air: a scientifically sounding, but inaccurate[34] trope finding fertile ground in collective memories of the „Seveso disaster", an industrial accident in 1976 through which high levels of dioxin were released, leading to panic which still

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[30] Tellingly, many Italians refer to the existence of the *campi nomadi* as a potentially *explosive* situation.

[31] Definitions translated from the Treccani dictionary. Source: http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/bonifica/ retrieved June 23rd 2015.

[32] At first sight, it seems that the practice of burning refuse intensified after the economic crisis because the livelihoods of many Roma have been reduced to „selling" this service to Italians, who increasingly dispose of their problematic refuse (such as used tires) for less money and effort by giving it to the Roma.

[33] „*Terra dei fuochi*" refers primarily to the territory between Caserta and Napoli, where illegal refuse burning (including through traffic of refuse by the local Camorra) took place on massive scales after the garbage crisis of 2007.

[34] According to the World Health Organisation, dioxin can be ingested as part of the food chain, not from air pollution. Source: http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs225/en/ retrieved June 25th 2015.

resonates with Italians. Pollution in the environmental sense overlaps with pollution as defilement, producing dangerous impurity (Douglas 2003[1992]). The pollution discourse also suggests how olfactive perceptions are mobilised in novel ways[35] in the construction of the *campi nomadi* as spaces producing an immediate danger carried in the air one breathes, thus suggesting fears of asphyxiation. Against this fear, demands have been formulated to intensify the police control and even to „bring the army in".

But fear is not the only – and not the most common – register of feelings which the camp inspires. On the right side of the train going from Lunghezza towards Rome, just before arriving at the station of Salone, one can read a large letter graffiti in the Romanesco dialect[36]: an injunction to go home, and an insult pertaining to the register of faeces[37]. Disgust and fear intersect to construct an object of abjection (Sigona 2003; Hepworth 2012), situated within and linked to the camp as a particular space of abjection (Kristeva 1982[38]). The multitude of photographs depicting the space of *campi nomadi* which circulate in (social) media attest to a voyeuristic consumption of such images and the ambiguity of abjection in its object being simultaneously experienced as repulsive and fascinating.

From the facebook page of the CAOP, it transpires quite easily that the greatest concern of the group is related to the existence of the nearby camp of Via di Salone,

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[35] Piasere (2005 [1991]) discusses how the „anti-Gypsy" olfactive sense associates intrinsically stench (*puzza*) with Roma bodies.

[36] The inscription reads „*Annate a casa merde*".

[37] The same register was also used by the Lega Nord affiliated member of the parliament Gianluca Buonanno during a TV show in March 2015, when he confronted a Roma activist by declaring „You (plural) are the faeces of society!" (*Siete la feccia della società*). See http://video.corriere.it/buonanno-lega-insulta-rom-sono-feccia-societa/9d3685e6-c17c-11e4-9eeb-2972a4034f5c, retrieved June 23rd 2015.

[38] For a discussion on the productivity of Julia Kristeva's and Mary Douglas' theories of abjection, purity and danger in the urban space, see Campkin 2013.

which earned the vigilantes the label of „anti-Roma patrols"[39]. It is the camp of Via di Salone which provides the group an unquestioned motive for mobilisation under the banner of security. The camp is the locus of powerful imaginaries of crime, degeneration and squalor, which contribute unequivocally not only to the construction of the Roma as a threat on multiple levels, but also to the production of insecurity narratives agglutinating several diffuse elements[40] in the construction of an anxiogenic figure feeding grassroots practices of control, surveillance and border patrolling.

It is the perceived permeability of the boundary of the camp which prompts patrolling. A normative idea that the boundary should be permeable only in one way, enclosing hermetically the Roma inside while allowing Italian citizens to enter at any time, on grounds not only that it is „Italian soil" but also paid with the taxes of Italians. The impermeability of the camp boundary generates the possibility of threatening contagion and invasion, even though the actual presence of the Roma is rather scarce in the neighbourhood. The night watch patrols include trajectories around the neighbourhood and stops of varying lengths of time at crossroads which mark the entrance points into the neighbourhood. They call the static surveillance of these entrances *presidio* (garrison), recalling again a militaristic vocabulary of defense and the assertion of territory control. *Presidio* stops ritually punctuate the patrols.

The vigilantes display an ambiguous attitude with regards to the space of the camp, from avoidance (the patrols do not reach the immediate vicinity of the camp) to provocative engagement, as the leader has entered the camp several times. On one

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[39] *Linkiesta*, July 2014. Nella periferia di Roma Est, con le pattuglie anti-rom,. Source :
http://www.linkiesta.it/nomadi-roma-emergenza-campi-rom-due, retrieved June 23rd 2015.

[40] Discourses around campi nomadi stress the lack of hygiene and rodent infestation, but also criminality, abuse to children, women and animals and environmental pollution.

occasion, he orchestrated the intervention of a group of animal protection guards[41] (*guardie zoofile*) on a rescuing mission on the presumption that the Roma, „due to their culture", abuse animals. The sentiment of ownership regarding the space of the camp as „Italian soil, paid with Italian contributors' money" is constitutive of a perceived legitimacy to penetrate the camp. This perceived legitimacy is embodied in violent wishes for „burning down" the camp[42]: a ritual of purification not yet enacted, the promise of violence against *campi nomadi* looms large in the Eastern periphery of Rome.

Conclusions

It is now time to tie together the loose ends and uncover what the ethnography of vigilante practices in the Eastern periphery of Rome suggests for novel understandings on the imbrication of security with other concepts. While the absence of security is generally taken to originate in feelings of fear, the ethnography of vigilantism in the Eastern periphery of Rome has shown that fear, although instrumentalised in the production of insecurity with regards to the presence of the Roma, is not the most common register in discourses around the *campi nomadi*. This signals the necessity of expanding the understanding of securitisation processes beyond the focus on speech acts, towards a more thorough understanding of the cultural and social processes through which groups are constituted as threats in particular localised contexts, and which conceptual articulations offer security concerns fertile soil and impetus.

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[41] The *guardie zoofile* are citizens who operate within an NGO for the protection of animals, but who are granted by the authorities the status of guards and have a policing function in the prevention and repression of offenses.

[42] At the end of May 2015, the group organised a protest demanding the dismantlement of campi nomadi, under the double discourse of decay and insecurity. The leader called this initiative „an ultimatum which we give authorities". When asked what would happen if the camps are not closed down, he responded that people would mobilise and burn the camp, after chasing its inhabitants away.

First, it transpires that it would be productive to conceptualise the articulations between notions of purity and culturally informed constructions of insecurity beyond the obvious „existential threats" generally accounted for by securitisation studies within international relations or political science, and explore the force of pollution taboos and conceptions of impurity in processes of threat construction. It seems that the example of the Roma, constructed as impure and thus dangerous, can be compared with a number of other groups subjected to securitisation discourses, such as certain categories of immigrants and asylum seekers, the homeless, LGBT, HIV patients, to name just the most obvious. The current religiosity enveloping notions of security may intersect dangerously with cultural conceptions of impurity, engendering violent purification practices not unknown to recent European history.

Although I have not concentrated specifically on this dimension, at several moments of the ethnographic description the unequal power relations and economic drives behind processes of securitisation have proven to be quite salient. Through the production of enclosures for the dangerous, urban utopias of orderliness and purity are constitutive of and reveal the lines along which social relations are shaped and inequalities are produced and reinforced. The cultural articulations between insecurity and impurity take place within particular power structures and espouse neoliberal forms of representation and practices productive for anthropological research (Hilgers 2011): the perceived demise of the state, the responsabilisation of the individual and depoliticised forms of citizen mobilisation, the primacy of economic interests, the emergence of securitarian policies disciplining the poor. These articulations highlight how securitisation processes depoliticise issues of power and simplify complex issues by naturalising conceptions of danger. The cultural analysis of notions of impurity and pollution should not detract from a careful consideration of power related dynamics: it is, in fact, the holders of (symbolic) power who impose their vision (Bourdieu 1989), including of categories of impurity and insecurity. In turn, this suggests that alternatives

to these visions do exist and are the object of continuous negotiations through which the agency of securitised groups can be made visible.

With particular relevance to urban studies, constructions of insecurity articulate in complex ways with discourses on urban decay. I have attempted to show how particular articulations of public order and security emerge in the junction of insecurity and decay. The nascent articulations reveal a totalising conception of security as order, in all its avatars. Visual order means an aseptic display of pristine objects in all their functionality and appropriate positioning. Functional order imposes a fragmentation of the roles of urban spaces and the prohibition of carrying out certain human activities in certain places, as the anti-decay regulations prohibited to eat in public spaces in the historical centre of the city of Rome, destined exclusively for visual enjoyment. These articulations shape the ways in which people occupy, interact with and give meaning to urban spaces. But also, they signal transformations of the roles and meanings given to the „forces of order", as literal drivers of these totalising conceptions of order and security. Additionally, the importance of the visual in the nexus between security and order suggests the possibility of defining an aesthetics of security collectively articulated and negotiated within the urban space. In this aesthetics, dirt, matter and people out of place are pushed to confined spaces in the making of urban closures; when they cross their borders, order is visibly threatened, calling into action practices of (in)security and rituals of purification.

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