

# Emplacing Smells

## Spatialities and Materialities of ‘Gypsiness’

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### ABSTRACT

As one of the most stereotyped minorities, the Roma are particularly ‘good to think’ in relation to constructions of Europeanness. In the production of ‘Gypsiness’, the body, the space, and the materiality of the dwelling are linked through smell as signifiers of a racial and cultural inferiority that does not ‘belong’ in and to Europe. Drawing on research projects carried out in the outskirts of Rome and in a small Romanian town, our contribution relies on a juxtaposed ethnography of constructions of ‘Gypsiness’ in relation to the spatial, sensorial and material inscriptions of the body. The article will examine the relationship between space and the social production of smell, discussing how spaces inhabited by Roma play a role in ‘doing’ Europeanness in a contrastive mode.

### KEYWORDS

Europeanness, Gypsiness, inhabited space, materiality, the olfactory, racialisation, sensorial anthropology

The politics of ‘Europeanness’ cannot be disentangled from the question of the racialisation of the Roma (Yıldız and De Genova 2017): their othering can tell us something about the claims to legitimacy of contemporary European liberalism (Hegburg and Abu Ghosh 2007: 7). Analytical attention to the processes that reify a putative ‘Gypsiness’ affords more than a furtive glimpse into how European identities are constructed in a contrastive mode. If various Europeans are constructed as all that the ‘Gypsy’ is not, the rationalities at stake in the othering of the ‘Gypsy’ as well as the corporealities, materialities, spatialities and sensorialities underlying such dynamics need careful unpacking.

This article joins the scholarly debate on processes of racialisation of the Roma, extending it to analyse how a putative European identity is forged not merely as a by-product of the Gypsy’s othering but also simultaneous to the everyday (re)production of Gypsiness. If scholarship has paid minute attention to the rationalities constructing Gypsiness on the discursive, cognitive and visual dimensions, the sensorial constructions operating olfactory distinctions have remained relatively



unattended to, notwithstanding the pervasiveness and ubiquity of the racist stereotype that the ‘Gypsy’ has a particular, unpleasant smell. On one hand, we aim to cover this striking gap in the literature on the racialisation of the Roma and connect with larger debates in sensorial anthropology and material culture; on the other hand, we argue that olfactory constructions play a crucial role in the ways in which collective identities are tacitly (re)produced across the European space and put forward the idea that the production of Gypsiness is intimately linked with the fabrication of the civilised European body epitomising culture, progress, modernity and propriety.

When we use the word ‘Roma’, we refer to the umbrella term that is given to a multitude of groups in the European space, such as Kaldarash, Khorakhané, Ursari, Cortorari, Manouche, Kaale and so on. While we are aware that the term artificially simplifies multiple identities, we use it for linguistic parsimony as the ethnonym uniting these groups under one term. In contrast, when we use the word ‘Gypsy’ (or, in Romanian, *țigan*), we refer to the racialised constructions through which such identities are stereotypically misframed in an often racist key.

Our analysis is grounded in two ethnographic researches carried out between 2014 and 2017 in two different settings, initially as separate projects but joined here to present concordant findings regarding the olfactory racialisation of the Roma. While Racleş analysed processes of sensorial othering in relation to household materialities from the so-called *țigănie* in a small north-eastern Romanian town, Ivasiuc performed an ethnography of police work in the peripheries of Rome, in particular around *campi nomadi*. The latter are spaces in which Roma who have migrated from Eastern Europe starting from the sixties have been amassed and segregated over the last thirty years in Italy. The article focuses on the discourses through which olfactory constructions (re)produce the ‘Gypsy’ as inferior other while positing European ‘civilisedness’ as superior on the corporeal, material and temporal dimensions.

The methodological move to juxtapose our ethnographies lies in the assumption, put forward by Giovanni Picker (2017), that the material allows us to draw ‘partial connections’ (Strathern 2004). Indeed, while we recognise the incommensurability of our research settings, we emphasise the connection between narratives relying on olfactory constructions through which, in both settings, the ‘Gypsy’ body and the space it inhabits is posited as inferior and uncivilised. The striking resemblance of discourses in our settings allowed us to move

beyond the local and to draw conclusions about the construction of 'Europeanness' by contrast to the 'Gypsy'. Rejecting methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), we argue that the constructions of our interlocutors do not simply refer to 'Romanian-ness' or 'Italianness' but also speak of trans-scalar constructions of Europeanness. Here we take a clue from David Theo Goldberg's conceptualisation of a 'racial Europeanisation' generalisable across local contexts and explore the 'racial contours of contemporary European self-conception' (2006: 331).

We first outline the mechanisms (re)producing Gypsiness that have thus far been addressed in scholarship and the relationality of these fabrications to the construction of other ideas of Europeanness. Then, building on existing scholarship at the intersection between sensorial anthropology and debates on material culture, we embed our argument in a conceptual approach of the sensorial-material nexus aimed at complementing the discursive-semiotic approach that most studies on constructions of Gypsiness have taken. Finally, we unpack our ethnographic material and show how the body – with its sensorial, material and topographic inscriptions – becomes a means of constructing Europeanness.

### **(Re)Productions of Gypsiness**

Scholarship has focused on interlacing mechanisms of racialisation (Vincze 2014; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2017) that construct the Roma as inferior other at the intersection of race and class. In a politics of difference, in particular since the second half of the 2000s, transnational policy discourses articulated the Roma as inferior others in need of a civilisational remake, framed as social inclusion intervention (Vincze 2014). The increasing Europeanisation of the Roma (van Baar 2011) entailed stereotypical constructions that sought to bring under the same policy umbrella very diverse groups whose cultural particularities were lost in translation. A plethora of interventions were implemented across Europe with the aim of raising the 'awareness' of the Roma regarding practices – such as schooling and wage labour – deemed crucial to being a normalised European subject.

Along the class dimension, the focus on the poverty of Roma groups has been a fundamental principle of racialisation (van Baar 2017), interlaced with processes of criminalisation. The latter translated very concretely into policies focused on the segregation of the Roma in

camps and ghettos, the deportation of migrant Roma – even as EU citizens – from several European countries and their increased policing as deviant others as a result of their framing as security threats (van Baar, Ivasiuc and Kreide 2019). Depoliticised discourses on the poverty of the Roma facilitated the slippage to neo-racist imaginaries of laziness and squalor, forging victim-blaming representations of undeservingness. These, in turn, have made resounding appearances in numerous western European politicians' discourses emphasising that Roma migrants from Central and Eastern Europe in particular have nothing to seek in their countries and should be integrated 'at home', in the periphery of the European project, where their presence would be less disturbing to Europe's putatively civilised centre.

While this scholarship focuses on the effects of recent European national and transnational policies on the construction of the Roma as deficient other and as 'failed' subjects of integration (Vrăbiescu 2019), another body of literature addresses the processes of stereotyping the Roma through media and popular discourses. Effectuating and reinscribing borders between various European 'we' and the 'Gypsy', such discourses continuously reproduce and enforce stereotypical imaginaries. For instance, Nadia Kaneva and Delia Popescu (2014) highlight the bordering processes between Romanians and Roma, underlining not only how nation branding is an identity construction project but also how it is predicated upon the problematisation of Roma migrants from Romania as criminal others and as carriers of the wrong cultural message about Romanians (see also Picker 2017; Wemyss and Cassidy 2017). In their obsession of distinction from the Roma, Romanians reborder themselves, constructing an identity that encompasses values similar to those they endow Westerners with; in such constructions, being hard-working, as opposed to the figure of the lazy Gypsy, is a central trope through which Romanian migrants negotiate their belonging in Western Europe in a relational manner (Ivasiuc 2017).

Comparable relationalities are at play in Ada Engebriksen's (2007) conceptualisation of constructions of Romanianness that rest upon the fabrication of the neighbouring Gypsies as primitive and uncivilised and require the meticulous work of everyday boundary making constitutive of ethnic groups (Barth 1969). The Gypsy other is the backdrop against which identities are produced in contrast, be it in the Romanian context, as we have seen (see also Woodcock 2007) or in Italy (Clough Marinaro and Sigona 2011; Picker 2017; Sigona 2002), Hungary (Stewart 1998) or Slovakia (Scheffel 2005).

Racialised representations that have been understood as manifestations of antiziganism (Agarin 2014) or Romaphobia (McGarry 2017) have been analysed in particular on the discursive and cognitive dimensions (van Baar and Vermeersch 2017), studied rather from afar than through an ethnographic lens deployed in the proximity of encounters between Roma and non-Roma. With regards to discourses and their circulation, Picker (2013) has outlined the productivity of static 'verbal icons' in the reproduction of a Gypsiness inflected with connotations of laziness and backwardness as well as the claims to truth laid by such icons when they acquire a sense of self-fulfilling prophecy ('*tiġannu-i tiġan*', translatable to 'once a Gypsy, always a Gypsy').

With reference to the senses, Leonardo Piasere (1991) devoted some attention to what he calls 'the antigypsy senses', outlining how sight, smell and hearing are used to other the Roma in a racist key in Italy. Yet scholarship on antigypsyism has paid more attention to the visual (see, e.g., End 2019; Tremlett 2019), neglecting other sensorial modes of construction and their effects on identity constructions. Similarly, the materiality through which such constructions are (re) produced, in particular through the legibility of the dwelling place and the *tiġānie* or camp as alien spaces, has routinely received less attention. It is to this gap that our article attends, linking the sensorial modes of constituting embodied Gypsiness as the otherness of the European body, to the materiality of the dwelling and the social production of space. In the following section we detail how and why such an analytical lens is fruitful in understanding constructions of the European body in opposition to the Gypsy body and the spaces it inhabits.

### The Sensorial-Material Nexus

Material culture studies operate with the understanding that material objects are produced by and produce social relations, practices and meanings. But while material culture scholars have analysed objectification, embodiment needs to be more diligently empirically approached in relation to materiality. Christopher Tilley (2006) argues that by grasping 'the manifold sensuous qualities of things, and of our human experiences of them, we may reach a fuller critical appreciation of the manner in which those things are ontologically constitutive of our social being' (71).

A focus on sensorial modalities and experiences as important aspects in the analysis of socialities emerged as ‘the sensorial revolution’ (Howes 2006a) whereby the social sciences and humanities engaged in the analysis of the sensorial as a social construction, shaped by cultural, political and historical dynamics. For instance, what the supporters of an anthropology of senses (see Classen 1997; Corbin 1986; Howes 2010) argue is that sensorial modalities do not operate socioculturally and politically in the same ways. Constance Classen (1997: 405) urged scholarship ‘to go beyond the audio-visual and recover the senses of smell, taste and touch as subjects of serious inquiry’.

As the meanings and representations of sensorial experiences are inextricably interlinked with the different geographical and political scales that situate bodies’ existence in the world, our argument concurs also with the argument of phenomenological origins according to which senses are tangled with each other. This is related to what was theorised as the inseparability of the senses (Ingold 2000; Pink 2006; Pinney 2002). In Sarah Pink’s words (2012: 3), ‘This involves departing from the modern Western understanding of the five-sense sensorium whereby our common sense tells us we simply smell through our noses, hear through our ears and see through our eyes’.

The sensorial-material nexus is of paramount importance for our argument, as it enables us to grasp what Jennifer Mason and Katherine Davies (2009: 601) called ‘the interplay between tangible and intangible sensory experience’ which is likely to be “‘classed”, gendered, and so on’. In addition, we intend to look at how it is likely to be racialised and, more concretely, how racialising repertoires of representations operate (cf. Hall 1997). Beyond the visual (and the tangible), the question of ‘representations’ is about language. In this sense, the work of Tilley is significant for our analysis as he, as Basu (2016: 380) puts it, ‘resists a purely mentalist conceptualisation of the world, recognising that even linguistic metaphors are grounded in the human body and in bodily experiences’.

Tilley (2002: 24) found that what connects the use of language to the use of things is that they are results of ‘an embodied mind’, speaking of the flesh as ‘a connective fabric of carnal tissue binding us to the world linking together words and things in the creation of meaning and the performative sphere of action’. Grounded ‘in the human body and in mental images of the world based on bodily experiences’, metaphors ‘have their own form of communicative agency’ (Tilley 2002: 24–25). It is metaphors like ‘the smell of *țigan*’ or ‘the smell of

laziness' and their 'communicative agency' that this article seeks to explore by looking at sociopolitical dynamics of emplaced smells, on the one hand, and embodiment and materialisation of Europeanness on the other. We now turn to the affordances of our ethnographic material in conceptualising the construction of the European body opposed to notions of Gypsiness, informed by the materiality of the places it inhabits.

### *Țigănia* and the Materialisation of Racialising Tropes

Located in Moldavia (the north-eastern region of Romania), Rotoieni (the toponym has been fictionalised for anonymity reasons) is a small town of fewer than ten thousand inhabitants where about 8 per cent of the population identify as Roma. Not all, but many of the Roma live on the outskirts of Rotoieni, in the area known as '*țigănia*', situated on a hill in the south-western margins of the town. Here most of the houses are located along a railroad that shapes the material, olfactory fabric and sound texture of this area. The neighbourhood is also referred to as the *Ursărie*, as most of the people of Roma background identify as *Ursari* Roma.

During the time I (Racleș) spent and lived with a Roma family in the *țigănie*, I – as a non-Roma researcher – was often asked, 'How can you stand that smell of *țigan*?' Thinking of the olfactory as 'the most denigrated sensory domain of modernity' (Howes 2006b: 169), this and other similarly disturbing tropes locate the olfactory dimension of the domestic space at the centre of a discussion about racialising processes of othering intrinsically interlinked with those of 'selfing' (cf. Baumann and Gingrich 2004). If, then, we consider the 'ideological nexus of "non-European"-ness that increasingly conjoins the figures of "Roma" [...] with racialised Blackness' (Yıldız and De Genova 2017: 6; see also Kóczé 2018), the ways in which olfactory tropes like 'that smell of *țigan*' operate locally cannot be understood as disconnected from how sensory/olfactory politics operate more broadly all over Europe.

*Țigănie* is the term used by both Roma and non-Roma and derives from the word *țigan*, which, in this article, taking a cue from Engebriksen (2007), is used as a signifier. Engebriksen holds that *țigani* is a position that implies relationships between Roma and non-Roma governed by asymmetric interdependency and power rapports. As such, it is 'a significant position in the Romanian figuration and in the collective identity of Romanians as ambiguous and stigmatised

“others” (193). The *ṭigănie* can be therefore understood as a socio-spatial racialising/ethnicising category with which locals operate in marking who *is* – almost irrecoverably – at the margins.

Non-Roma interlocutors often invoked ‘That specific smell of *ṭigan*’ as that which would enable one to distinguish Roma bodies and households from those of others. ‘Only those who did not live among/with them might not know . . . but for us . . . it is impossible not to *sense it*’ was how some people used to answer questions about what ‘*that* specific smell’ meant. Others insisted that it was the innate laziness that confined their inhabited space and bodies to the realm of the immoral and filthy odours.

In the *ṭigănie*, though, the concern with the olfactory texture of their households shaped women’s engagement with household practices. They would regularly and diligently clean the house and bleach the interior walls of their homes, with the aim of ‘changing the air in the house’. The decorative practice of hanging carpets on the interior walls, for example, was also referred to as a way of ‘renewing’ the smell in the house. Once they are freshly washed, the wall carpets ‘freshen the home atmosphere from inside’, as one of the research participants put it.

The practice of hanging wall carpets is particularly interesting, considering the racialising discourses to which people who hang them in their houses are subjected. From the interviews that I carried out with Roma and non-Roma about the ‘Abduction from the Seraglio’ kind of carpets, as they were referred to, I learnt that they went from being objects that everyone (Roma and non-Roma) enthusiastically hung on the interior walls of their houses to being deemed as obsolete items that supposedly indicate the inhabitants’ backwardness and ‘lack of will to modernise’.

The discussion about wall carpets with Georgian, a non-Roma salesman, is quite illustrative of how Roma are discursively relegated to the realm of backwardness, laziness and, thus, ‘smelliness’. On a September day in 2014, early in the morning, at the local bazaar that used to be organised every Thursday in Rotoieni, Georgian, like others, was hoping for potential customers to pick anything from his merchandise. Regarding the wall carpets, Georgian mentioned that in the past years it was mostly Roma who sought them. According to him, it was due to *their* (*ṭigani*’s) innate proclivity toward colourful decoration and a bad taste that Roma exaggeratedly decorated *their* inhabited spaces and bodies (referring to ‘traditional’ Roma women’s colourful skirts).

Georgian's reaction to the idea that some Roma people still hang wall carpets for a variety of reasons, among which the attempt to keep the walls warm or to cover the irregular surfaces, was:

You and me . . . we might have had moments of financial shortage in our life, but it does not mean that I washed myself less, or that I looked after myself less. I think this is one of *their* excuses . . . I don't know. I've seen people with a precarious material situation, but as they are good-quality people, even if they had only three pieces of clothing, I've seen them always impeccably clean. I've also seen those who had many clothes and . . . *too much spray and too little soap*. That's how it is with *them* [the Roma] . . . I don't know . . . they associate some things. As if, if I buy a dark-coloured linen, I shall wash it less. [ . . . ] Do you think that they washed [the wall] if they hung a carpet [on the wall]? I don't think so.

While most of my non-Roma interlocutors operated with olfactory metaphors like 'the smell of a stuffy coat' or 'the smell of laziness', Georgian did not explicitly employ them; instead, based on people's individual engagement with the material world, he distinguished between essentially 'good-quality people' and allegedly 'bad-quality people', the latter being those who paradigmatically 'use too much spray and too little soap'. The spray seems to allude here at the intent of 'bad-quality' people to conceal what is generically deemed to be a source of shame, namely bad smell or dirt. But whereas spray is thus associated with ephemeral concealment of the implied dirt or foul odours, soap seems to be used as a signifier for the genuine and 'real' commitment to bodily sanitisation processes.

The reference to soap is quite illustrative of the racialising discourse about *figani* as backward, unwilling to modernise and having a dubious morality, thus contrasting Europeanness. Feminist scholar Anne McClintock (2000), analysing commodity racism, imperial advertising and the development of the soap industry in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century, wrote that soap was invested with the aptitude to bring 'moral and economic salvation to Britain's "great unwashed"' (132). Rotoieni's 'great unwashed' are thus those 'bad-quality people' who, in Georgian's interpretation, seek subterfuges for eschewing the use of soap, such as using spray, covering the walls with carpets or purchasing dark-coloured items. Not using soap is thus an epitomiser of the alleged resistance and unresponsiveness of 'bad-quality people' to the 'European civilised standards' of being in the world.

While classically racism operates by relying on 'external signs (physical or not) to infer internal, biological or inherited essences to explain behaviour, culture, and social position' (Lemon 2000: 63), the

conversation with Georgian indicates how ‘everyday racism’ (cf. Essed 1991) relies on imaginaries of why and how *others* engage, in certain ascribed ways, in everyday practices and with material objects. These ways are deemed to make detectable, on a visual and olfactory level, *their* failure to ‘follow “decent human standards”’ (Largey and Watson 2006: 31) as well as their allegedly innate embodied features that impede them to do so. The sensorial details from Georgian’s account are indicative of how certain engagements or disengagements (i.e., the use of spray instead of the use of soap) with the material world are mapped onto both Roma people’s bodies and inhabited space and, at the same time, of how these imputed (dis)engagements confine bodies and inhabited spaces to the realm of ‘foul odours’ that operate as ‘pivotal index[es] of moral, racial, ethnic, class and cultural difference and marginality’ (Manalasan IV 2006: 41).

The quotation from the interview with Georgian is thus not essentially about *them*, *the țigani*. More than about people of Roma background, whom Georgian relates to the category of the so-called ‘bad-quality people’, it is rather about the category of the so-called ‘good-quality people’. The affirmation of belonging to the latter is inextricably interlinked with the construction of *other* bodies and materialities as offensive and backward. The fact of reproducing and operating with such categories emerges from a long history of racialising, impoverishing and marginalising individuals of Roma background. The reproduction of such local hierarchies and, thus, of Gypsiness as a position of inferior otherness is the premise for one’s (in this case, Georgian’s) self-affirmation as being ‘better’, more civilised, more European than *those others’* bodies and houses.

Such racialising repertoires of representation about Roma as innately uncivilised, inert and unrighteous citizens ignore the fact that Roma themselves also penalise indolence and lack of commitment to cleanliness principles that should supposedly guide the body-related and household practices. Roma women who participated in this research repeatedly emphasised the bodily efforts and time that need to be invested to counter the bad smells that might permeate any household located in the *țigănie* and, thus, to prevent any potential (racialising) match between the repertoire about ‘smelly Gypsiness’ and allegedly objective/visible evidence. Due to their socially allocated duties related to the household, Roma women respond to the racialising constructions that relegate the Roma bodies and inhabited spaces to the realm of olfactory otherness by justifying, contesting and self-distancing from such constructions.

This analysis based on the ethnographic research in Rotoieni discussed how the domestic space is infused with meanings of one's industriousness, commitment with community values as well as with one's virtue and merit of deserving to be recognised as a righteous citizen both locally and nationally. Roma seem to be locally relegated to the margins of such a realm of deservingness. But in a 'united Europe' the local identitarian dynamics that contribute to the (re)construction of Gypsiness as racialised otherness can be understood only in relation to Europeaness and to the social, cultural and moral standards attached to it. As such, the different forms of self-identification and othering across scales (nation, city, neighbourhood, household) are grounded in local ways of understanding and making oneself European. In the Romanian context, for instance, Europeaness is often framed as that which is aspired to and appropriated through the adjustment of practices and discourses according to supposed standards of Europeaness.

In this process Gypsiness gets locally constructed as that which impedes the fulfilment of these standards and, thus, 'Romanians' acquirement of Europeaness. It is in this context that we understand Georgian's implicit self-affirmation of Europeaness – thus, civilised, righteous citizen and 'unsmelly' – based on the explicit racialising construction of the '*țigani*' as 'naturally' backward, lazy and 'smelly'. The next section focuses on another European setting and form of inhabited space – the *campo nomadi* – and reflects on how Gypsiness is constructed as racialised otherness in opposition to Italianness as another form of Europeaness from the perspective of the sensorial-material nexus.

### ***Campo Nomadi* and Sensorial Abjection**

The particularity of its Roma-related policies grounded in the *campo nomadi* as technology of government since the eighties has given Italy the nickname of 'Campland' (ERRC 2000). Most authorised camps were set up by local authorities in dubious industrial zones generally isolated from inhabited spaces, often close to landfills and polluted areas, in an 'urbanism of contempt' (Brunello 1996) that begot a double territorial stigmatisation; not only did the land taint the bodies that inhabited it but it itself became tainted through the presence of those abject bodies. Significantly, once a camp is evicted, the land is subjected to operations of '*bonifica*' (reclaiming) as a ritual of

purification. The camp became the signifier of a putatively uniform nomadic culture, with ‘no strong “roots” in, but only loose “routes” through European cultures and societies’ (van Baar, Ivasiuc and Kreide 2019). Camps materialised at the intersection of an exoticising and repressive invention – that of a culturally based nomadism perceived as in need of protection within multicultural liberal Europe – and, ambiguously, imaginaries of moral depravation, deviancy and inadequacy to the norms of the sedentary society. Hinting at the European-ness of such constructions, it has to be noted that Italy had merely copied the model of the French and British ‘equipped transit camps’ that were established in the sixties for Roma populations on recommendations from the Council of Europe to protect Roma culture. The supposed nomadism of the Roma is still associated today with inferiority – because they are seen as ‘pre-modern’, untied to wage labour and, thus, unproductive in the capitalist economy – but also, significantly, with danger. The Roma are othered as perpetually out of place and, hence, dangerous: the impure elements are the ones that have heterogeneous characteristics problematising their belonging to one or another category (Douglas 1991). The ambiguity of the camp lies in its own and its inhabitants’ projected *mobility* and *temporariness*, but de facto *stability* and *permanence* and facilitates their perpetual production as dangerous others.

Throughout the last twenty years the Italian state intensified police control and repression in camps. Following the resounding episode in which, in 2008, the Berlusconi government declared the ‘nomad emergency’ as a state of exception in three Italian regions, providing local authorities with the power and financial means to enact security measures aimed at Roma groups, in Rome right-wing mayor Alemanno set up a special police unit to control *campi nomadi*. Initially under the name ‘Operative coordinating unit for nomad settlements’, the unit was tasked with monitoring, controlling and carrying out evictions of informal settlements of Roma as well as facilitating their transfer from the camps the administration intended to close towards other camps. Later on, the unit changed its name to *Unità Organizzativa Gruppo Sicurezza Pubblica ed Emergenziale* (SPE) – ‘Unit for public and emergency-related security’, masking in its new name the fact that the unit was conceived, for all intents and purposes, as an ethnic police.

The unit comprises about sixty policemen and policewomen. Some of them have been involved in operations related to policing both authorised and unauthorised Roma settlements since the nineties and have a long-standing work relationship with the commander

of the unit. When they make their appearance in camps, the Roma know that these men and women 'belong' to the commander and refer to them as such. In 2014 this unit was tasked with monitoring *campi nomadi* around the clock by placing patrols at the entrance in particular of those camps in which the phenomenon of 'toxic pyres' (*roghi tossici*) was the most prevalent. Due to a mixture of neglect by the public waste services, of economic activities of metal extraction performed by some of the Roma, of mafia-related refuse dumping practices and of cost-reducing strategies of non-Roma individuals and firms disposing of bulky waste illegally near camps, many of them are surrounded by heaps of waste. Periodically, these are burnt, generating large amounts of smoke and social alarm in the surrounding neighbourhoods. This has prompted many Romans to demand strict surveillance and even military intervention in camps. The narrative unravelling around the phenomenon makes use of the olfactory repertoire by emphasising the 'acrid stench' (*puzza*) of the smoke spilling over a large distance and the fact that it endangers one's health when inhaled (Ivasiuc 2019).

When on monitoring duty – a task that is informally called, in the police unit, *servizio zingari* (Gypsy service), two officers park the police car outside the entrance of camps, at a distance of twenty to fifty meters, and wait, observing people going in and out of camps. Sometimes they decide to check the papers of vehicles parked outside, some of which are vans the Roma use to collect and transport scrap metal. When they see the smallest sign of smoke, most of them attend to it, asking inhabitants to put down even the fires they light to cook food outside. Sometimes the officers engage in conversation with camp inhabitants, but most of the time they sit in the car and chat, waiting for the end of their turn or to be called for more pressing tasks.

The first time one of the police officers from this unit suggested I (Ivasiuc) accompany them to the nearest camp, it was a short-cut answer to my question, 'What is it like to work with Roma?' He raised his arms and shoulders and shook his head, gesticulating the impossibility to find the right words to describe it. He said, 'You would have to *see* for yourself. Once you see how they live, how they smell, what the camp looks like, you will understand everything about the Gypsies. I can't tell you more. You just have to see yourself, that's it'. Two of his colleagues sitting in the office where the discussion was taking place nodded in agreement. Words were simply not enough to articulate, let alone for someone else to grasp, what it meant to work, as a police officer, in *campi nomadi*. What was deemed necessary was

an unmediated sensorial process of taking in the reality that rested on the assumption of an inevitable shared perception. What was deemed unspeakable was possible to convey sensorially, notably through sight but also, importantly, through smell.

As the patrols approached the camp or drove inside its narrow, muddy alleys, the officers deployed a ritual of repulsion that invariably involved grimaces, covering their noses and comments regarding the *puzza* that were approvingly received and often repeated and elaborated upon by the other colleagues. The ritualistic litany of complaints about the surrounding smell quickly found anchors in material clues that the eyes could meet outside or inside camps: heaps of waste, burnt car carcasses, rats wandering about, dilapidated containers, chock-full garbage dumpsters and, after the rain, grimy waters muddying the alleys. Officers were showing one another these things: ‘Look at the rats!’, ‘Look at the garbage!’ they often repeated, inviting the audience to acquiesce to the common interpretation: that a place of such squalor cannot but contain subhuman people. The smell of the camp became inextricably linked to its materiality and to the bodies inhabiting it. Such bodies were looked upon with disgust, and when officers had to approach men or women in the camp, they often commented on their smell as irrefutable proof that the camp inhabitants were uncivilised: ‘How can they live like this?’ To this question the common answer among officers was that ‘it must be in their blood’ to live in squalor, in complete disregard of the fact that unpleasant smells often came from the broken sewers that the authorities did not rush to repair. Although we do not have the space here to expand on the ways in which Roma contest such narratives – which they repeatedly do – it is important to add that this is one of the arguments that they often deploy to dispute their – or their camp’s – representation as ‘stinking’ by virtue of cultural propensity to uncleanness.

In the summer of 2015, as I was at the police station consulting documents related to police activity in camps, a Roma woman was brought in from the city metro, where she was allegedly pick-pocketing travellers. She had to be strip searched, and the task was given to one of the policewomen in the office in which I was carrying out my document research. When she returned to the office, a long tirade followed about the smell of the woman. The *puzza*, she claimed, is something that all Gypsies have and that one can recognise from miles away. She sniffed her hands, complaining that ‘this smell stays with you regardless of how much you wash your hands’, hastening to use disinfectant gel from a small container she carried in her purse. To

no avail: she could still smell the scent of the woman. She sniffed her clothes and all around her and said that now that smell would stay with her for ages, that once you inhale it you cannot shed it off for days. She added, with a series of grimaces, that it makes her convulse and wish she would not have to do such a dirty job.

The sense of intimate contamination that the police woman conveyed through her elaborate reaction to the smell of the Roma woman's body reminds of the construction of the abject that Katherine Hepworth grounded in Judith Butler's (1993) and Julia Kristeva's work (1982) while analysing how the Roma are abjectified in Italy. Abjection, Hepworth (2012) writes, is 'a process or series of acts through which the subject comes to constitute itself through the expulsion of that which it is not. . . . [T]he act of exclusion by which the abject is cast out defines the subject; this act of division (or rather boundary inscription) is the process that forms the subject' (433). The abject body 'threatens the subject with contamination and defilement, inducing violent reactions, repulsions and convulsions' (ibid.) whose viscerality signifies the intimacy of the act through which the subject is both constituted and disrupted.

The same sense of dangerous contamination was conveyed by a remark that one police officer once made after exiting one of the camps after a patrol: 'And now', he said with a grimace while looking at his hands in disgust, 'it's time for an epidemiological check-up!', suggesting, albeit jokingly, that all of our bodies had been contaminated through our sheer presence in the camp and that that alteration and alienation of our bodies needed an act of purification to return us to our uncontaminated selves, constructed as pure in contrast. The laughter and approval that came from his colleagues in reaction was one of the many rituals of community through which the police officers repeatedly bonded while complaining about foul smells during their '*servizio zingari*' in camps.

Often, while performing this task, the officers would comment on the time of the day and how the children they could see 'should be in school right now' and that their parents should be at work. Embedded in arguments emphasising the anomaly of the squalid camps' presence in 'our normal' society with its norms of hygiene, such remarks reinforce the out-of-placeness of the 'Gypsy' in a Europe constructed as the embodiment of progress through its insistence on education and hard work. For the police, in turn, the poverty of the camp inhabitants and the squalor of the spaces they inhabit could only ever demonstrate their own failure to raise up to the European modern way of life and,

hence, their nonbelonging. Just as the repeatedly uttered metaphor of the camp as ‘third world’ space (*terzo mondo*) expels its inhabitants out of Europe, the normative appraisal of how they use their time projects them in a past that Europe is supposed to have long superseded, constructing them as allochronic (Fabian 1983). The materially and temporally disorderly Gypsy is the epitome of an ever-lasting premodernity that is operated with in discourses of self-affirmation and practices of self-attributing Europeanness as a category relying on conspicuously civilised, clean, orderly and disciplined bodies.

### Conclusion

The article examined the relationship between bodies, space and the social production of smell, arguing that the spaces inhabited by Roma and their sensorially mediated materialities and temporalities are agentic ‘contact zones’ (Pratt 1991) that ‘do’ Europeanness in a contrastive mode. We reflected on the importance of the materiality of the inhabited space in the process of constituting Gypsiness as sensorial otherness that does not belong to the realm of Europeanness and, as such, in the process of articulating one’s inhabited space and body as European. From the scale of the body and the inhabited space, we analysed through a sensorial lens how olfactory representations circulate between scales and are transposed into particular conceptions of European identities, in ritualistic reaffirmations of community in contrast to the Gypsy other.

At the sensorial-material nexus, the inscriptions of the body and of the dwelling place in olfactory metaphors underlining the ‘Gypsy’ as uncivilised other participate in the construction of a European body purged of unpleasant smells but always permeable and vulnerable to being alienated – hence, incomplete and in continuous (re)constitution in the encounter with the Gypsy. If the materiality of dwelling and olfactory constructions around the body and the inhabited space are important for the constitution of Gypsiness, they also tell us something of worth on how the normative European body is constituted in opposition but always in precedence and in superiority to it. In contrast to the *unclean*, *uncivilised*, *unindustrious* and *undisciplined* Gypsy body, the European body is constituted as conspicuously clean, civilised, industrious and disciplined. It is through these prefixed negations that the *un*-Europeanness of the Gypsy is meticulously reproduced as crucial other that European identity supposedly pre-dates as norm.

By speaking of pre-dating we wish, however, to allude to the predatory quality of such constructions also. The sheer ungraspability of a 'European' identity, the empty signifier resonances that it has – fiercely brandished when it comes to excluding others from Europe but singularly troublesome to articulate without relying on these others – makes such constructions a predatory practice of dispossession of others' humanity and worth.

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