

“I am just like you, but you don't see it”: stories of ordinary blindness in nowadays Italy

Racism in Italy

Racism in Italy is very much widespread, but few people would realize and admit the existence of it. The typical statement from an average Italian goes: “I am not a racist, but ...” and here you can add everything from “Romanians are all thieves” to “Gypsy people only commit crimes and don't want to integrate” to “I cannot stand Africans”.

A very good example for this hit the headlines these days in Italy, where a teacher in Rome told to a Jewish student which was not feeling well and therefore not being attentive to the lesson, “If you would have been in Auschwitz, you would have been attentive”. Upon a request of explaining her comment, she affirmed: “I am not anti semitic, I said that to refer to a very well organized place”, thus worsening her position. There is a very good thing about this episode though, namely that the classmates of the girl defended her, accusing the professor of racism, thus revealing sensitivity toward the problem¹.

This paradoxical attitude, that makes the acceptance of the unacceptable possible, in conflict with all the democratic rules upon which Italy and the western societies are built, leads to prejudices underlining in the immigrants a *de facto* ineptitude and diversity status that makes “them” unable to integrate with “us”, and thus erasing the equality principle, allows the discrimination to take place.² This schizophrenic attitude is expressed also in an another widespread phenomenon of nowadays' Italy: the very same people that affirm what I explained above are also the same people that in their

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http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/04/05/news/ad_auschwitz_saresti_stata_attenta_classe_in_rivolta_contro_la_prof_antisemita-55973828/?ref=search seen on 5 April 2013.

2 Oliveri, Federico, 2009, p.50.

houses or companies employ immigrants, included illegal ones, in order to underpaid them and exploit them, sometimes obliging them to work in inhuman condition.

In the past years, some signs for a need of change on the side of the immigrants in Italy had also begun: the so called “strike of the immigrants”, taking place every 1 March in many Italian cities, more than an actual strike, is a chance to raise awareness and put forward a request to sort out the problems concerning immigration and the way politics deal with them, from the desperate conditions of the shelters where the immigrants are put in some regions upon arrival, sometimes kept there for months without any freedom of movement, to the difficulties regarding the permit of stay, created by the 2002 Law Bossi - Fini³. The media all over the world reported the facts of Rosarno, in the region of Calabria, where on 7 January 2010 the African immigrants working in the harvesting of oranges started a rebellion after two of them were wounded by two unknown people, subsequently revealing to Italy and to the world the desperate living conditions that they were enduring, living in barracks with mice, rubbish and without any sort of comfort, subjected to exploitation and discrimination from the local mafia. Three years later, as showed in the December 2012 video by the newspaper “Il Fatto quotidiano”⁴, the situation is actually worst and likely to rage new protests but, as is common habit for Italy, political institutions just ignore the problem.

Much of the “dirty job” to build the current wave of racism and stereotypes has been carried out by the Italian media, that present the immigrants as violent and stealing jobs, therefore as a threat for the Italians.⁵ This is conveyed, for instance, with the very classical image (especially for Italians watching TV, still the only mass media through which the strongest majority of Italians takes information⁶) of immigrants coming with the 'barcone', a boat with which many desperate African people cross the Mediterranean

3 The law Bossi – Fini, 189/2002, sees a job offer as a requisite to enter Italy and a contract the mean to obtain a residence permit, increasing the expulsions from the country. In Woodcock, 2010, p. 477.

4 Galeazzi, Lorenzo & Musolino Lucio, 'Arance, rabbia e schiavitù. Tre anni dopo, Rosarno teme un'altra rivolta dei migranti', 20 December 2012, Il Fatto quotidiano.

5 Pagliai, 2011, p. 97.

6 According to Larica (Laboratory of Advanced communication research), 90,8% of Italians use TV as a way to take informations and for 62,1% of them TV is the most influential in forming opinions.

seeking a better life; this makes people think that most of the immigrants come into Italy in this illegal way, whereas most of the people do come legally.⁷

This image contributes also to create the idea that WE are overwhelmed by THEM, that they are “invading” only Italy among all the European countries, whereas Italy is still the country in Europe with smallest number of immigrants, although it considerably increased in the last decade.⁸

These premises may clarify why, as it is presented in Pagliai's research, racializing discourse is socially accepted in Italy and very often used as an “ice-breaker” among people that know each other very little or not at all.⁹ Even worst, people that disagree with the racist speech, find themselves sometimes in the position of starting a discussion in order to be able to defend the different opinion or, given that the racist remarks are not perceived as problematic by the person using them, thus taking for granted that the other shares the same point of view, the latter has ultimately to succumb to the racist remarks, in order to avoid fighting and consequently spoil the relationship.¹⁰

The study is extremely important, in my view, to show how racism is generally accepted in Italy and how the targeted groups of immigrant (such as Albanians or Romanians for example) sometimes find themselves in the position to hear racist comments regarding their in-group and must decide whether to fight racism or not.

One of the saddest consequences of this racism limbo is the difficulty for the immigrants and their children to integrate, sometimes leading to a problem of identity's crisis, feeling ashamed to declare their own origin.

Regarding Albanians, an interesting study has been carried out, which investigates this identity problems and the feelings of the Albanians for their stigmatization, which range from anger to resignation and in other cases as said above, shame or mutual

7 Ibidem.

8 Pagliai, 2011, p.96.

9 Pagliai, 2011, p. 94.

10 Pagliai, 2011, p. 95.

acceptance¹¹.

It is also interesting to note, in my view, that the very same mass media that contributes in Italy to the creation of the stereotypes and prejudices so widespread in the country, is also the same that, for instance in Albania, creates the “Italian dream”, presenting the country as a paradise to which fleeing to. As King and Mai reports, TV constructed a process of *anticipatory assimilation* in the Albanians, making people feel part of the country even long before migrating to it¹².

The non acceptance of the other that Italians, most of the time unconsciously, experience, may also be connected with the *ius sanguinis* upon which the Italian acquisition of nationality is based, leading to the fact that even children born from legal resident immigrants cannot acquire the Italian nationality, communicating the idea that if you are not born from Italian parents you are not Italian, even though maybe the parents do not have ties any more with the country of origin, having been in Italy for the past 30 years. Sometimes this thought gets to the very commonly heard bias that “he/she is not Italian because he or she does not look Italian”, going back to a stereotyped idea of what being Italian means.

Currently there is a debate on giving at least the right to vote to legally resident immigrants, brought forward by the left, but we are still far from arriving to a change.

A data that for me can highlight the situation of racism in the country is the research conducted by Padovan and Alietti on Islamophobia and Antisemitism in Italy: only 12% of the people interviewed were found to be tolerant toward Jews and 4 % towards Muslim, which demonstrates little willingness to live in a multicultural and multi-religious society and little understanding, in my opinion, of the society itself.¹³

It is not surprising then that the 2012 Amnesty International report finds racism and xenophobia considerably increased in these past years, especially towards Roma,

11 King & Mai, 2009, p. 117.

12 King & Mai, 2009, p. 122.

13 Padovan & Alietti, 2012, p. 190. Research conducted with 1528 interviews on a representative sample.

Muslims, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants¹⁴.

Furthermore, the following data from Eurobarometer, is extremely important to introduce the situation on which I will focus upon, the racism towards Roma in Italy: 47% of Italian citizens would feel very uncomfortable with having Roma neighbours.¹⁵

The situation of the Roma in Italy

“Si immagini ora un uomo a cui, insieme con le persone amate, vengano tolti la sua casa, le sue abitudini, i suoi abiti, tutto infine, letteralmente tutto quanto possiede: sarà un uomo vuoto, ridotto a sofferenza e bisogno, dimentico di dignità e discernimento, poiché accade facilmente, a chi ha perso tutto, di perdere anche sé stesso”¹⁶

“Imagine now a man to whom would be taken away, together with his beloved people, also his house, his habits, everything at last, everything he has: he would be idle, just suffering and needing, without dignity and undiscerning, since it is very likely that who has lost everything ends up losing himself too”¹⁷

It is estimated that in Italy there are around 150.000 Roma, half of which have been resided in Italy for centuries and are therefore Italians (the Sinti); the rest comes from Romania and ex-Yugoslavia, although very often lacking documents to attest it.¹⁸ Thus the Roma constitute 0.25% of the Italian population, making Italy the country in Europe with the smallest presence of Roma population¹⁹. As we shall see hereafter, this data has clearly been hidden by the political propaganda I will further analyse, so that many Italians had in the past years (and probably still nowadays) erroneously believed that we really have a Roma problem, with up to 2 millions Roma (this is the perception of 35%

14 2012 Amnesty International Report.

15 Mc Garry, 2011, p.289.

16 Levi, Primo, *Se questo è un uomo*, 2005, Einaudi, Torino, Italia.

17 My translation

18 Mc Garry, 2011, p. 288.

19 Hermanin, 2011, p. 1734.

of Italians²⁰) ready to commit crimes. Even though we lack a precise idea of the different ethnic groups that constitute the Roma population in Italy as well as in other European countries, Roma people are identified by having Romane language in common²¹.

The majority of Roma people in Italy live in what in Italian is called “campi nomadi”, or “nomad camps”, in the outskirts of main Italian cities such as Rome or Milan. They may be authorized or not, but the living conditions of these camps are extremely degrading, without running water, electricity or heating system; most of the times they are what in one word we may call slums. These type of “camps” are not present in any other European country²².

No matter if they are actual Italian citizens or no, for Italian society and especially for the political mainstream, the Roma people are perceived as “other”, as foreign, and used as a scapegoat for many of the problems of the country.

This belief that leads to the strong prejudices so intrinsic to the Italian culture, has seen an escalation starting from 2008, during Berlusconi's last government. Although the targeting of Roma people was already present previously, the newly elected government, which contained in its coalition a xenophobic party (the Northern League), has started a tougher targeting of Roma people, extending the so called “security package”²³ to many more Italian cities and intensifying the forced evictions of Roma people from the camps.²⁴

The emergency decree that will so seriously affect the Roma has been enacted under the civil protection law, to respond to emergency deriving from national disasters²⁵. These an extract of the words contained in the decree, signed by Mr. Berlusconi, President of

20 Data presented at the European conference on Roma, held in Rome, 22-23 January 2008. Only 6% is able to give the correct estimate and 56% declare not to know.

21 Hermanin, 2011, p.1733.

22 Corriere della Sera, <http://lacittanuova.milano.corriere.it/2013/04/08/benvenuti-in-italia-il-paese-dei-campi-rom/> seen on 11/4/2013

23 The Security package had been approved already by mayors of Rome and Milan in 2007, to respond to a “Roma emergency”.

24 Mc Garry, 2011, p. 289.

25 Hermanin, 2011, p. 1734.

the Council of Ministers: “*Considering the extreme critical situation for the presence of numerous irregular third-country nationals and nomads who have steadily settled in urban areas; considering that the mentioned settlements...have engendered a situation of serious social alarm, with potentially severe consequences for public order and security for the local populations... considering that the situation... due to its intensity and extension, cannot be tackled using the instruments envisaged by ordinary legislation*”²⁶. It is clear enough by the words used that the will was to transform a situation that was under all means critical, but that has been like that for a long time, into an emergency one, like if it had started at that time, giving the wrong idea that Italians were under a real social threat.

Forced evictions were not the only measures included in the “emergency decree”. Another unlawful act was perpetrated parallel to the evictions, that of *ethnic census*²⁷.

The decree in fact included special powers to the prefects of Rome, Milan and Naples, as we have seen, not only to implement forced evictions, but also identification, including of minors, expulsion of the irregulars and forced replacement. Clearly attracting the attention of international institutions, especially EU ones and NGO for Roma human rights, three months later the Interior Ministry had to emanate recommendations to limit collection of data and fingerprinting only to 'extreme difficult cases'.²⁸

As McGarry reports, the decree also contained the permission to expel EU citizens if they have committed crimes for which they have been convicted to up to two years in prison. Under EU law, it is strictly prohibited to expel EU citizens or people that have been resided in an EU country for 10 years or more, except in cases where public

26 Ministry of Interior, 2008a, ‘Censimento dei campi nomadi’, http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/sala_stamp/speciali/censimento_nomadi/index.html - 2008b ‘Guidelines to implement the Ordinances 3676, 3677, 3678 of 30 May 2008 concerning the encampments of nomadic communities in the regions of Campania, Lazio and Lombardy’, 17 July.

27 Hermanin, 2011, p. 1731.

28 Hermanin, 2011, p. 1737.

security is at risk²⁹. How then was possible that this decree was implemented, making people firmly believe that we were endangered?

A possible answer might be the escalation of hysteria that followed some incidents that happened in the country before the decree was approved in the Parliament, therefore allowing the beginning of the so called “emergency”. In order to understand it though, it might be useful to go back to how the prejudices towards Romane speaking people were built in Italy. Since the 15th century, when we can trace back the beginning of the discrimination towards the Roma and the presence itself of them in the country, with the first eviction taking place in Milan in 1493, the Roma have been subjected to stereotypes and prejudices³⁰. The first one is the one that wants them to be nomadic, linking nomadism to criminality, lack of religiosity, witchcraft practices and unlawful behaviours, such as baby-kidnapping³¹. Later on, this stereotype has been reinforced by the writing of Cesare Lombroso, whom in his 1876 book *L'uomo delinquente* (*The man who commits crimes*) associate the stereotype with the physical characteristics of the Roma, thus allowing the discrimination to be legitimized³². Within this stereotype it is possible to notice also a gender bias, that attributes only to Roma women the practices of baby-kidnapping and witchcraft and to men an uncontrolled sexual power (as we shall see later, this idea will be applied to the facts happened before the approval of the “nomad emergency” decree), making therefore Roma look as primitives and not able to integrate into society, thus justifying the marginalization. It is fundamental to note that most of Roma nowadays are not nomadic any more. Along the course of centuries and specifically during the Communist regimes years, in mainly all East European countries, such as Romania, Czech Republic or the Balkan countries, they have been obliged to settle down and forced to integrate, leading in many cases to the loss of their traditions. During Second World War, the prejudice toward the Roma toughened, thus regarding

29 Mc Garry, 2011, p. 289-290.

30 Woodcock, 2010, p. 471.

31 Ibidem.

32 Ibidem.

them as 'Other' than Italians, further marginalizing them at the edge of society and then persecuting them until the Nazi fascist regime included them in the ethnic cleansing³³.

After the war, Roma continue to be kept outside of the Italian society; by the '80s, Italian started to receive huge flows of immigrants, that took the place left by Italians who emigrated abroad in the previous decades.³⁴

Hence we arrive to the problem we still face nowadays both with Roma and other immigrants and to the “emergency” decree into consideration: Italian governments had never really faced the immigration issue, letting it become a 'permanent social emergency'.³⁵ Specifically regarding the Roma case, the arrival of Roma from the Balkans during the war years and lately from Romania between 2002 and 2007 has been perceived by Italians and by politics as aggravating a yet unresolved issue, thus also confusing the newly arrived Roma with the Italian Roma and Sinti already present in the country.

In this general climate of intolerance built up along the course of the last decades and centuries towards Roma in Italy, we arrive to 2008, when Berlusconi wins the elections and, as said previously, approves the “nomad³⁶ emergency” decree, thus declaring the Roma situation an emergency as it is common practice for natural disasters such as the 2009 earthquake in Abruzzo or real emergency as the rubbish problem in Naples.

Two events, prior and after the elections, worsened the situation and created a real hysteria in the country, leading to the approval: the first one, in October 2007, was the rape and murder of a middle class woman by a Romanian Roma in Rome, the second an

33 Woodcock, 2010, p. 472.

34 Ibidem.

35 Ibidem.

36 The use of the term 'Nomad' is itself wrong given that the Roma in Italy and elsewhere in Europe are not nomadic any more but in most of cases have been resided in the country for centuries. It is used though in Italian just as a way to refer to Roma in a pejorative connotation. Furthermore, as Nando Sigona, a Romani rights activist states, the use of the term nomad also gives the idea that Roma are not citizen, thus recalling the ancient prejudice. If we think about that, with the practice of forced evictions used in Italy, it is the Government itself to re-transform the Roma in nomadic, obliging them to wander from place to place, very often the same ones from which they were previously evicted.

alleged baby-snatching in Naples, shortly after Berlusconi wins the elections.³⁷

The rape and murder of the woman instilled a sense of insecurity for all women to be at risk, including elder and middle class ones, and started a deliberate wave of violence from Italians towards Roma, Romanians and Albanians as well, the first two often mistaken as being the same thing³⁸. The equation was therefore “all women are threatened by non-Italian men”, thus creating a wave of 'masculine ethnic nationalism'.³⁹ Just two days after the sexual assault, the Government passed decree 181/2001 to expel every European citizen considered as a threat. Many people were expelled without a due process and Roma were subsequently vilified by Italians⁴⁰.

A research conducted at that time by the newspaper '*Corriere della sera*' revealed that for 70% of Italians, living with Roma was not possible at all, even though were Romanians, mistakenly perceived to be narrowly tied to Roma, to be specifically pointed at⁴¹.

The second episode, the baby-kidnapping in Naples, happened on 10 May. An Italian woman claimed that her baby was kidnapped from her apartment by a Roma woman living nearby. Immediately after Italian men started to attack all Roma and Romanians in the surrounding area, until three days later up to 400 people, including women, attacked a 'nomad camp' and burnt it down⁴². None of the Roma people that were evicted from the camp and whose belongings were burnt down by Italians was nomadic, but were victims of the prejudices that since ancient times wants them to be so and therefore being criminals. The journalist Gianfranco Faillaci, on the online newspaper 'Ucuntu', in its article where affirms that in Italy there had never been a confirmed case of baby-snatching, when referring to what happened in Ponticelli, Naples, highlights the fact that the dwellers of the building where the claiming woman was living, in the days

37 Woodcock, 2010, p. 475- 479.

38 Ibidem.

39 Ibidem.

40 Ibidem.

41 Ibidem.

42 Woodcock, 2010, p. 479.

before the woman's claim, had had several meetings to find a way to evict the Roma families leaving in the neighbourhood⁴³.

Following these events, on 21 May 2008, as stated above, the newly elected Italian Government passed the 'Security package'. In Naples as well as in other parts of Italy, police and even army were deployed onto the streets: according to the politicians, enquired by international institutions, it was to protect Roma from the angry citizens, but in reality this decision and the approach of the politics itself was to foster a climate of hatred⁴⁴. To clarify this, a quote from the then Interior Ministry, Roberto Maroni, of Lega Nord (the Northern League, the xenophobic party in coalition with Berlusconi's) may be of importance: *“that violence is what happens when gypsies steal babies or when Romanians commit sexual violence”*⁴⁵, thus first of all justifying the violence of the Italians towards the Roma and secondly implying that all the Roma and Romanians commit those crimes, enforcing the stereotypes and legitimizing them.

The following year, again in Rome, the rape of a young Italian girl from whom she allegedly described as “Arabs” is another occasion for attacks on the side of Italians toward Romanians in the area, although they had nothing to do with it. Some Roma were then arrested and released afterwards because the DNA didn't match, although the police still wanted to retained them for no real reason⁴⁶. More army was sent on Italian streets to patrol the situation. Berlusconi famously declared, defending its decision, that “pretty Italian women won't be safe until there won't be as many soldiers around to protect them”⁴⁷. Of course these awkward and unbelievable statements and facts wouldn't be possible in any other European or Western country, and are very often understood as extremely exaggerated also in Italy, but they reflect anyway a stereotypical idea of women still present in the country, the one that Berlusconi

43 Gianfranco Faillaci, 29 May 2008, “E' vero che gli zingari rubano I bambini?” <http://www.ucuntu.org/I-ladri-di-bambini.html>, seen on 6 April 2013.

44 Woodcock, 2010, p. 479.

45 Ibidem.

46 Woodcock, 2010, p. 481-482.

47 Woodcock, 2010, p. 483.

embodies: women being vulnerable and in need of protection, thus provoking rape with their passive attitude. Rape is therefore wrongly perceived as physical, sexual desire instead than as a mere excess of power. Within this paradigm then, an Italian woman has to be beautiful to gain the protection of her man, of course an Italian one, giving the wrong idea that rapists are only foreigners, whereas in Italy women who are subjected to violence receive it mainly from their partners or from other men whom they very well know⁴⁸.

Amnesty International last report specifically states that the 2008 “nomad emergency”, declared both by the Italian 'Consiglio di Stato' and by the Council of Europe illegitimate and in violation of the human rights standards⁴⁹, allowed Italy to derogate from human rights law.

It is of no surprise then that a data from the 2008 ENAR shadow report, citing European researches, highlights how the general atmosphere in the country is one of fear, with one out of two Italians considering foreigners as a risk for the country and 35% being a threat for the culture, religion and identity⁵⁰.

But what exactly happened in the main Italian cities of Rome and Milan?

In 2009, in Rome, after the decree was passed the previous year, the so called “Piano nomadi per la capitale”, or “Plan for the capital's nomads”, started to be brought into play. At that time, the nomad camps in Rome, both authorized and not, were more than 100 and the objective of the plan was to dismantle them and transfer all the Roma, estimated to be around 7000 in Rome, into 13 “organized villages”, some of whom already existent, some yet to be built⁵¹. All together, 9 “tolerated” camps were to be closed and more than 80 illegal ones to be dismantled, for which the Interior Ministry

48 Ibidem.

49 Amnesty International 2012 report.

50 ENAR (European network against racism) 2008 Shadow report, p. 8.

51 Source: Corriere della sera, 31/ 7/ 2009,

http://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/09_luglio_31/piano_nomadi_roma-1601621809519.shtml, seen on 1 /4/ 2013.

had disposed 19,5 million Euro⁵². This plan, presented in Rome by the mayor, Gianni Alemanno, ex MSI (Movimento sociale italiano, extreme right wing party), now in Berlusconi's party, by the Prefect, Giuseppe Pecoraro and by the Interior Minister, Roberto Maroni was defined by the latter “an example to be followed”⁵³. According to other sources⁵⁴, the “nomad plan”, beside having being declared illegal and not necessary because there was indeed no real emergency or threat, costed instead 60 millions Euro, thus adding up to the politics of squander we are so much used to hear about in Italy, when it comes to State's money spent wrongly. Furthermore, most of the camps that were to be built had never been built.

In order to better understand why the nomad plan in Rome was a failure and a waste of money that could have been spent otherwise, avoiding exclusion practices and rather preferring integration, it is important to cite another information contained in a report by the weekly magazine *Espresso*: the Council of Europe Commissioner for human rights, Nils Muižnieks, visiting in July 2012 one of the camp in Rome where people were transferred to, said: “I could see with my own eyes the segregation imposed to the Roma families transferred here by means of forced evictions”.⁵⁵

A good example for this is given in the documentary by Stefano Liberti and Enrico Parenti on the situation of the newly established camp “Via Salone” after the forced evictions of the “Casilino 900” Roma camp in January-February 2010, before then the biggest Roma camp in Europe. The new camp in Via Salone, (1200 people, now holding the record of biggest Roma camp) is far outside Rome, with no connections to the city, mixes up people that didn't know each other (all the Roma here come from Romania or ex-Yugoslavian countries), thus creating a very tense situation between the different families and ethnic groups, leaving aside the fact of being cut out from the chance to

52 This sum was supposed to be for the whole Lazio, Rome's region.

53 Ibidem.

54 Repubblica & L'Espresso, 2/ 11/ 2012, http://inchieste.repubblica.it/it/repubblica/rep-it/2012/11/02/news/il_fallimento_del_piano_nomadi-45769127/ seen on 1/ 4/ 2013.

55 Repubblica & L'Espresso, 2/ 11/ 2012, http://inchieste.repubblica.it/it/repubblica/rep-it/2012/11/02/news/il_fallimento_del_piano_nomadi-45769127/ seen on 1/ 4/ 2013.

have a real normal life⁵⁶.

Another dramatic reality in Rome where Roma people are discriminated and even afraid to talk for fear of reprisals is the “nomad camp La Cesarina”⁵⁷. The case of this camp is emblematic of the bad way in which justice, politics and police work in Italy, very often starting off the many scandals in which they then find themselves embedded in, many times colluding with mafia. Ten years ago, the then “Camping Nomentano” was inspected by police, which found 126 illegal immigrants obliged to pay to the owner 200 Euro for a place to stay, of course in inhuman conditions (a situation not uncommon in Milan as well, often going under reported). The owner, with the charge of exploitation of illegal immigration, was arrested but very soon released. Later on the mayor, in a deal with the landowner, Propaganda Fide, an organization belonging to the Vatican, signed a contract with the person that was currently managing it, the very same one that was arrested shortly before, to build a “solidarity village”. Some 200 Bosnians and Romanian Roma are moved there from other camps that had been shut down.⁵⁸

When the July 2009 plan started, the Cesarina camp was already running. The mayor gives power to an “external society” (no wonder, the head of this society is again the same person that was arrested years before) to manage the camp and control the security of it.

By discovering this and entering the camp to see the conditions, the *Associazione 21luglio*⁵⁹, one of the most active Italian NGO, especially in Rome, for the protection of Roma rights, discovers an extremely degrading situation: water only two hours a day, fights to use it, few electricity, so that if someone by using it provokes a blackout, he or she will be deprived of it, as a punishment, for some days and in the summer, absolute

56 <http://www.anordestdiche.com/senza-categoria/campososta-in-8-minuti-le-tensioni-del-piu-grande-campo-rom-deuropa/>, seen on 1/ 4/ 2013.

57 Corriere della Sera, 21/ 9/ 2012, <http://lepersoneeladignita.corriere.it/2012/09/21/la-cesarina-il-campo-nomadi-dove-i-rom-hanno-paura/> seen on 2/ 4/ 2013.

58 Also at that time the Mayor, Veltroni, was trying to resolve the Roma situation.

59 <http://www.21luglio.org/>.

denial to use fridges, thus creating problems of hygiene and health⁶⁰.

Calculating all the money that the city hall spends for this camp, we get to the huge amount of 587.400, including a sum of 50€ a month blackmailed by the owner of the place to the dwellers. The Roma people interviewed by the association were extremely frightened and *21 luglio* had to hide every single detail in order to avoid reprisals. Beside the obvious conclusion that this money could be invested in different types of policies, how is it possible that this happens in a European country?

Associazione 21 luglio carried out a study to investigate the psychological results of the forced evictions⁶¹. The study underline the importance of the house for the Roma, identified with the family itself, the main point to which they refer to and that allowed them to overcome the suffer they experienced throughout their history and remain united. It narrates the feeling of loss and disorientation experienced after the evictions, reported in interviews made to the Roma, where they tell that some of them keep coming back to the place from which they were evicted, some refuse to do so, some have panic attacks, depression, insomnia, headaches, hallucinations⁶².

Associazione 21 luglio has also released, in January this year, a “Roma and Sinti Agenda”⁶³, offering to political institutions and associations a possible solution to the situation of the Roma people in Rome. The most important point that the agenda highlights is the need for Italians, specifically here the Romans, to overcome the prejudices towards the Roma population, which clearly derive from a whole widespread ignorance of the Roma's culture. This is the base that foster the vicious circle in which the city is caught nowadays, because the fact that the majority of the population strongly associate Roma with crimes leads to the demonstrations of intolerance and opposition in having them living nearby. The report, after underlining all the politics of forced

60 Corriere della Sera, 21/ 9/ 2012, <http://lepersoneeladignita.corriere.it/2012/09/21/la-cesarina-il-campo-nomadi-dove-i-rom-hanno-paura/> seen on 2/ 4/ 2013.

61 Associazione 21 luglio, “Rapporto etnografico sul mal essere causato dalla politica di sradicamento abitativo nei confronti delle comunità Rom e Sinte a Roma”, Rome, February 2012

62 Ibidem

63 “Agenda Rom e Sinti, dall'ossessione securitaria alla solidarietà responsabile. Sei punti per voltare pagina a Roma” available at <http://www.21luglio.org/index.php/notizie/177> seen on 11/4/2013.

evictions and the violations of human rights that were perpetrated in the last decades in Rome, suggests the next steps to be followed to change the course of events that until now characterized the city: the first step is to abandon the “emergency approach”, which gives as already said the wrong idea that we are in danger, in order to start an approach of social inclusion; taking into consideration, together with the Roma families, the different living solutions; regulate the stateless people and a special focus on empowering women. The main general objective that the agenda pursue is to arrive, within 5 years, to the closure of all the “nomad villages” in Rome and therefore to the complete stop of the forced evictions⁶⁴.

In Milan, according to last year's municipality plan concerning the Roma, Sinti and Caminanti⁶⁵, there are about 2.500 Roma, living in authorized and not authorized camps, or in camper and caravans. Many of them are Roma and Sinti that have been in the city for centuries, working in the traditional jobs of managing carousels and circuses⁶⁶. The rest, that came in the last decades as for Rome, are Roma coming from ex-Yugoslavia and Romania. Particularly the latter has been the group that suffered more from the forced evictions operated also in Milan, because of the “nomad emergency” put into practice here as well. The story that I decided to narrate, regarding Milan, is their story, a story of forced evictions but also of positive integration within the Italians of the neighbourhood. Via Rubattino, east Milan, is one of the places from which Roma were evicted many times and to which, in 2008, during the time of the “nomad emergency”, people kept coming back, lacking alternatives, given that the policy followed by the then mayor Letizia Moratti was just to remove the barracks with the evictions without doing something to integrate the Roma. The good thing for this Romanian Roma was to be followed and helped by the 'Comunità Sant'Egidio', which took particular care in enrolling the children in school, seeing education as the primary

64 “Agenda Rom e Sinti, dall'ossessione securitaria alla solidarietà responsabile. Sei punti per voltare pagina a Roma” available at <http://www.21luglio.org/index.php/notizie/177> seen on 11/4/2013.

65 “Progetto Rom, Sinti e Caminanti 2012-2015”, Municipality of Milan, guidelines released on 6/7/2012.

66 Giunipero & Robbiati, 2011, p.22.

mean for integration. Throughout mediation and the help of the volunteers and the teachers, the Roma children manage to attend school but what is also fundamental in this experience is the acceptance, built up during the school year, by the Italian parents of the Roma, the mutual respect and friendship that eventually were built up between adults as well. Unfortunately, in 2009, 19 November, the Via Rubattino camp sees another forced eviction, early in the morning, that leaves 300 people, including the children attending school, without a place to live. The dormitories offered are not sufficient and especially require the families to be split between women with children and men. The hectic situation of those days shows that Milan has another face as well, not only the racist and xenophobic one which infamously characterizes it as a “right wing city”, but also one of solidarity, with people offering their homes as a shelter to the Roma, donating food and blankets and starting off integration's programs, such as scholarships, financial backing to pay the house rent, Italian courses for adults, training on the job, thus demonstrating that this is the only way to get rid of the “emergency” paradigm and ultimately integrating the Roma⁶⁷. The book tells how the families helped by the “Comunità Sant'Egidio” are continuously evicted from place to place, from one side to the city to the other, creating difficulties for the children to attend. 200 out of the 300 people initially evicted from Rubattino in November 2009 (the ones that couldn't be inserted in the inclusion programs) came back in the same place in the summer of 2010, again evicted right before the starting of the school in September 2010. As *Corriere della Sera*⁶⁸ reports, Via Rubattino camp has been evicted again in September 2012, but the approach has been less violent and more in line with the international standards, compared to the previous ones. All together in Milan, between 2007 and 2011, 540 forced evictions have dismantled more than 2500 barracks, sometimes arriving to 7 evictions per day in 2010.⁶⁹

67 Giunipero & Robbiati, 2011, p. 45-54.

68 http://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/12_settembre_27/sgombero-campo-rom-nomadi-abusivo-rubattino-tendopoli-bambini-2111996939976.shtml seen on 11/4/2013.

69 Gianipero & Robbiati, 2011, p.63.

In 2011 the mayor changes, together with the approach to resolve the Roma's situation: the new “Project for Roma, Sinti e Caminanti”⁷⁰ is presented a year later, which has as its main objective the elimination of the “camp” system and the inclusion of the Roma, rather than the forced evictions, giving an alternative accommodation to the people, the education of the children and help to get into the job market. Among the different housing possibilities, there is one, which was decided during the emergency decree time, that gives 8.000 Euro as contribution to pay the rent⁷¹. This latter has created lots of protests also these days, sometimes xenophobic, claiming to lock up the Roma in the concentration camps together with the mayor itself, fostered by the propaganda of the extreme right and by the exasperation experienced by many people, also in a rich city such as Milan, because of the economic crisis⁷².

Rights' Violations

What are then the fundamental human rights and principles that had been violated in Italy with its actions towards the Roma people?

The first, the *equality principle*, has been the object of various debates within the international doctrine. First of all, it is important to define it as the: “*correspondence between a group of different objects, persons, processes or circumstances that have the same qualities in at least one respect, but not all respects, i.e. regarding one specific feature, with differences in other features.*”⁷³

Furthermore, there is general agreement in dividing the equality principle between

70 “Progetto Rom, Sinti e Caminanti 2012-2015”, Municipality of Milan, guidelines released on 6/7/2012.

71 http://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/07/03/news/ottomila_euro_ai_rom_per_la_casa_ecco_il_piano_della_giunta_pisapia-38418755/ seen on 11/4/2013.

72 http://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/04/11/news/bufer_a_xenofoba_su_palazzo_marino_soldi_ai_rom_no_bruciate_i_campi-56411787/ seen on 12/4/2013.

73 Source: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

formal equality and *substantive* equality.

The formal equality, being described for the first time by Aristotle as “*treat like cases as like*”⁷⁴, requires two people having the same status in at least one respect to be treated equally within it. It is therefore the fundamental principle of equality, from which we may derive the notion of *discrimination*, whether direct or indirect. The first one occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another one or a group would be in the same situation on the basis of one or more prohibited grounds, such as race, ethnicity, sex, descent, pregnancy, language, religion and so forth, possibly leading to detriment.⁷⁵ Indirect discrimination arise instead when because of a provision or a practice a person whose status or characteristics are associated with a prohibited grounds experience a clear disadvantage compare to others, unless the provisions are utterly justified by a legitimate aim.⁷⁶

Substantive equality goes deeper into the subject. Highlights how formal equality does not go into the roots of the problem and by introducing the concept of *equality of opportunity*, tries to actively eliminate the origins of discriminations, in order to offer people same starting points⁷⁷.

At the national level, is is possible to find the *equality principle* in Article 3 of the Italian Constitution, where it is stated that: “*All citizens have same dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions. It is duty of the Republic to remove all the economic and social obstacles that, by limiting freedom and equality between citizens, forbid a full development of the human being and the effective participation of all workers to the political, economic and social organization of the country*”⁷⁸. This article

74 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V.3. 1131a10-b15; *Politics*, III.9.1280 a8-15, III. 12. 1282b18-23, in *ibidem*.

75 Source: The Equal rights trust

76 *Ibidem*.

77 *Ibidem*.

78 Art. 3 of the Italian Constitution: “*Tutti i cittadini hanno pari dignita' sociale e sono eguali davanti alla legge, senza distinzione di sesso, di razza, di lingua, di religione, di opinioni politiche, di condizioni personali e sociali.*”

protects the citizens from all forms of discriminations and privileges and enhance importance of the concept of dignity for all people. The second part of the article highlights the positive obligation of the State towards its citizen to ensure an effective removal of anything that might deny them to enjoy a full development, thus being the base of all social rights, such as right to housing and education, which are some of the rights violated in the Roma case.

Article 4, “*The Republic recognise to all the citizens the right to work and fosters the conditions that can make this right effective. Every citizen must have an activity that, according to his or her own possibility and attitude, will contribute to the material or spiritual progress of the society*”⁷⁹. Thus, by continuously denying to Roma people the help to integrate into society, for instance by facilitating access to the job market, the Italian State has violated also this article of the Italian Constitution.

At European level, the *European Convention of Human rights* protects all European citizen by violations of human rights, including the ones perpetrated by Governments. Article 8, right to respect for private and family life, has been violated by Italian public authority when entering the authorized or not authorized camps in order to schedule the Roma, without notice, in the middle of the night or at dawn; article 13, right to an effective remedy, has also been breached because to date, no justice has been given to the Roma for what happened in the camps; article 14, the anti-discrimination article, has also been violated because, as said previously, Roma have been discriminated on the bases of their ethnicity.

At the international level, the very core of the CERD (International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination), signed and ratified by Italy in 1976,

E' compito della Repubblica rimuovere gli ostacoli di ordine economico e sociale, che, limitando di fatto la liberta' e l'eguaglianza dei cittadini, impediscono il pieno sviluppo della persona umana e l'effettiva partecipazione di tutti i lavoratori all'organizzazione politica, economica e sociale del Paese.”, my translation.

79 Art. 4 of the Italian Constitution: “*La Repubblica riconosce a tutti i cittadini il diritto al lavoro e promuove le condizioni che rendano effettivo questo diritto. Ogni cittadino ha il dovere di svolgere, secondo le proprie possibilita' e la propria scelta, un'attivita' o una funzione che concorra al progresso materiale o spirituale della societa'*”, my translation.

particularly Part 1 (Art 1 to 7), has been violated by Italy with the policies that were put into practice with the forced evictions, the ethnic census and expulsions, as well as the lack of support in providing to Roma effective remedies, such as housing, access to the job market and help in integrating the children with the schooling process.

Conclusion

It was very important for me to choose this topic and develop this essay, getting to know more about something that, since I started to be interested and work in the international development field, I feel as a widespread phenomenon in Italy, particularly in my city, Milan. Even during the time when I was writing it, I had continuous occasions to see and hear, or read when I was not in Italy, hate for who is wrongly perceived as different. Sometimes I am afraid because I would like to explain, I would like to talk, but the blindness and deafness are too strong to allow it and I am also afraid because I know that it takes nothing for the violence to start off. Last time I was in Milan, a city where most of people are nervous, impatient, very little tolerant, the atmosphere tense, I heard for many minutes the driver of the bus I was on insulting with a plural word, a general “all of them”, just because of a misunderstanding on opening the doors with, he believed, a non Italian person, or just because every excuse when there is tension on both sides is enough to start the riot. The Italians are prejudiced and affirm that “they” do not respect “us” and our rules, (this is valid especially for Roma or Muslims), but they don't see that most of the times immigrants are just doing what is allowed or tolerated for Italians as well, as when you go to a foreign country you always try to integrate by imitating the behaviours of the locals. It is partly because of this that, as in Italy, it happens to a woman to be sexually harassed by men, these men are firstly Italians, for many of which it is normal to do so and then also foreigners, for which can also be a normal thing according to their own culture. But the very same ones, put in

another European country where locals do not behave like that, will be very less likely to do so, as it is not common practice and socially accepted.

On the other side, the immigrants in Italy are overwhelmed by this exacerbated climate and sometimes over react, thus worsening the situation; sometimes they don't understand us, as we don't understand them.

Going back to the Roma, the choice was for me natural, having passed from having experienced 10 years ago a robbery attempt in the Rome underground by a Roma woman, after which I kept holding my bag in the presence of Roma, to working one year on an educational project for Roma children in Romania, an experience that make me understand that the Roma are first of all people, like us, good bad or something in between and that the children, as the children of the Milan camps, were only children, cheerful, energetic and happy, willing to learn. The story told in the "Comunità di Sant'Egidio" book says that it is possible to live together, that Roma children are only children, with rights, such as the right to be educated and that the prejudices forbid to see that not all people are the same, just because they belong to the same "ethnic label", which should not exist at all, as not all Italians, French or Americans are the same. These stories, my personal one in Romania and the one in Milan, make me believe that a future brighter than the past is possible, but that there is a long way to go to achieve it, that passes through a different political class, a change that seems still far from being realized in Italy, that looks to the world as it is and not as it was, that think about the well being of its citizens, all of them, not to their own interests; a willingness of the people to sometimes stop running from one thing to another, and analyse, try to go deeper into what is happening to us, our city, our neighbours, with different lenses, as much as possible out of the stereotyped ideas, because the world, although psychologically we deny it, is made of the many different shades of the many different colours we have around us, that all belong to human beings.

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