

Italy

The analysis of education policies, discourses and practices targeting the Roma in Italy: opportunities for education within difference

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Summary

This paper sets out to analyse discourses and practices of racist discrimination in the education sector against Roma living in so-called nomad camps in Rome, as well as local policy and anti-racist activist responses. The paper is based on a case study conducted in Rome comprising interviews with exponents from institutional organisations, anti-racist movements, grassroots organisations, journalists and individual activists, both Roma and non-Roma, as well as with Roma living in various authorised camps of Rome, mainly originating from former Yugoslavia and Romania.

The situation the Roma experience in these camps is serious and characterised by very precarious living conditions, which include housing, education, and occupational and legal status. The national Nomad Emergency Decree issued in 2008, like the “Nomad Plan” established in 2009 by the City Council of Rome, tightens control over the Roma population, segregating them even more and establishing an increasingly rigorous camp regime¹. Apart from the political direction of the current government or City Council, the segregation policy, the confinement of the Roma into “nomad camps”, and the creation of surveillance services, “socio-educational” services and nursery schools only for Roma children within the camps, constitutes a historically rooted pattern of relating to the Roma. In the fascist era, Italy also set up concentration camps for the “gypsies”, who were considered racially and socially dangerous. Obviously one

¹ The State of Emergency has been judged as unlawful and unfounded by the national Council of State on 16 November 2011, leaving the situation of the Roma at the moment of the drafting of this paper still unclear. For a more detailed analysis of the “Nomad Camp” and the issue of the “Emergency Decree”, please see paper “The Geography of (anti-)Racism and Tolerance: Local Policy Responses, Discrimination and Employment: Roma in Italy”.

cannot draw simple lines of continuity from that period to today. However, it is important to stress that the will to re-educate the Roma seems to be a constant element in the relationship to Roma, as are images of the Roma as a dangerous, deviant and asocial population.

The Roma are in any case constructed as a “problem”, with a “difficult culture” that prevents them fully “integrating” into mainstream society. This way the concept of race is delinked from racism – regarded as an individual attitude based on lack of tolerance and great ignorance – although it still lives on in cultural arguments.

While several national and communal schemes and legislative initiatives for the inclusion of immigrated children and more specifically for the inclusion of Roma children have been launched and established, the Roman City Council has instituted and pursues a segregating policy of the Roma population, which supports the racial discrimination most Roma children suffer from in schools as well as the low school attendance rates and early leave of these children.

Anti-racist and pro-Roma activists oppose the City Council, but have shown themselves unable to detach fully from the imaginary of Roma “nomads” in their proposals for solutions. Furthermore, internal differences hinder the construction of effective solutions by the various pro-Roma and anti-racist groupings.

The efforts to establish inclusionary programmes to assist Roma into the education system risk becoming futile if racism continues to be considered as a problem of “wrong” attitudes and convictions, rather than a structural paradigm that permeates society, including institutions, civil society and anti-racist organisations.

Introduction

In Italy Roma² are considered to be “nomads” and mostly confined to “campi nomadi” / “nomad camps”, consisting of camper vans, containers or shacks. The presence of Sinti³ and Roma in Italy can be traced back to the 15th century. They came to the Italian peninsula presumably from the Balkans or directly from Greece across the Adriatic

² The term “Roma” refers to persons describing themselves as Roma, Gypsies, Manouches, Kalderash, Machavaya, Lovari, Churari, Romanichal, Gitanoes, Kalo, Sinti, Rudari, Boyash, Ungaritza, Luri, Bashaldé, Romungro, Yenish, Xoraxai and other groups perceived as “gypsies”. The term “Traveller” refers specifically to Irish Travellers, who are not Roma and are native to Ireland. The terms “Roma” and “Travellers” are not intended to minimise the diversity within these communities or to promote stereotypes. (FRA 2006b:16 in Law 2010:165).

The enumeration of the various sub-groups of Roma can be contested as means to enforce specific identitarian definitions upon them. Many Roma here defined themselves as Serbs, Croats, Yugoslavian, Romanian, rather than as Roma belonging to certain groups. There is a sort of insistence with the specific definitions which strengthens the sense of non-belonging to a national entity. Simultaneously, the insistence on identity is important in the fight for fundamental rights.

³ The Sinti distinguish themselves from the Roma and vice versa.

Sea, and settled in the Italian region of Abruzzi and Molise – those people are still called “Rom abruzzesi” (Lapov 2004: 39). Among the Sinti, a distinction is made between Italian Sinti and “Germanic” Sinti, the latter living in the far north of Italy. The Germanic Sinti came later, in the mid-19th century, and the Austrian Sinti in the first two decades of the 20th century. These are all “historical communities” and are differentiated in mainstream society from the other Roma communities in Italy who immigrated more recently (ibid.).

Major migration of Roma to Italy happened in stages, the first between the two World Wars in the 1920s and 1930s. This influx consisted especially of Rom Vlax originating from the Carpathian and Danubian regions, Rom Kalderash, Cergarjia and Lovarja. Other groups from Croatia and Slovenia came between the 1920s and 1940s and mainly live in central and north-eastern Italy (Lapov 2004: 40). At the end of the 1960s, a second major migration of Roma happened, consisting mainly of Khorakane Romà (Muslim Roma) and Dasikané Romà (Christian Roma) originating from Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro, and later from the 1970s onwards from Serbia, Croatia, Kosovo and Macedonia. These have mostly settled in the big urban centres (ibid.). Recent immigration consists of Romanian Roma and of war fugitives from ex-Yugoslavia.

The demographic presence of the Roma and Sinti in Italy can only be estimated. Nonetheless about 110 thousand to 180 thousand Roma and Sinti are said to live on Italian territory, of whom about 70 thousand are said to be Italian citizens and mostly belong to the so-called historical minorities, while the remaining Roma immigrated especially from ex-Yugoslavia (Lapov 2004: 41). Although the number of Roma in Italy is unclear, it is small in relation to the entire population on Italian territory, but it is perceived as being much greater, and above all as a problem. Although it would be misleading to link racism to the numeric presence of minority groups, we have chosen to reporting the numbers, as the uncertainty produced various censuses of Roma in the “nomad camps” that were highly contested.

The WP3 case study focuses on the educational status of Roma children living in the “nomad camps” in Rome, with a special emphasis on the situation of children of two authorised camps of the city.

The situation of the majority of Roma people in Italy is characterised by very precarious living conditions, especially for those – about 12 thousand, according to the 2008 census in Rome, Milan and Naples – who live in the “nomad camps”. The condition of housing is one key factor, and the racial discrimination to which Roma are subjected here affects other key fields such as occupation and education opportunities.

This has made racism towards Roma a vicious circle difficult to break. There are multiple actors on Italian territory (civil society organisations, individual activists, trade unions and the institutions) with different agendas for the “Roma problem”. In the case of Rome, the institutional policy makers on both left and right have attracted great opposition with their programmes for the Roma. Anti-racist activists claim(ed) that there was a lack of serious solutions on offer to tackle housing, education and employment. At the same time, the anti-racist activist scene (consisting of various “big” associations, individual activists, *centri sociali* and more recently Roma associations) was and is mostly active in the school service and training Roma as cultural mediators, and it has proposed a number of solutions to the institutions for dealing with the camps. The schooling “problem” of the Roma has always attracted major attention and generated major inclusionary schemes in contrast to the attempts to include the Roma into the housing and occupational market. However, it is important to note that the associations themselves are divided about the “right” policy for Roma. Besides, many activists lament the absence of a serious commitment on the part of the Roma to change their own situation. Other Roma activists speak of racism and intolerance by Roma against the gadjos (non-Roma), which hampers their successful “integration”. In the education sector, the major anti-racist associations are involved in projects that include picking the children up and bringing them to school and back. In the employment sector, the actors are more divided over a common strategy. Some underline the importance of promoting so-called traditional occupations for the Roma (craft markets, recycling waste and old metal), while others opt for a strategy that should enable young Roma to compete with “Italian” youth.

Occupation and education are overlapping areas and mutually conditioned. Moreover, they are especially affected by housing conditions, which means the camp. It is crucial to note that the camp was initially conceived as an instrument for the preservation of “gypsy culture”, and that it has gradually become a mechanism for power and control over the “gypsies”. The camp “produces” the “gypsies”. This in turn has negative effects on the job market and in schools.

This paper tries to tackle the Roma “problem” in Italy, especially in the city of Rome. The Roma suffer from racist discrimination, based on a deep-rooted form of racism, which is anti-gypsyism, and which is reflected in action for and against the Roma. This discrimination is an obstacle to their efforts towards empowerment and emancipation, making it difficult to understand where to start resolving their situation.

The paper begins with a brief introduction to anti-gypsyism as a specific form of racism, which is important to understanding the particular situation the Roma experience in Italy, expressed in various measures aimed at this community. Crucial to

this understanding is an explanation of the housing situation known as the “nomad camp” and a recent political framework for dealing with the Roma, consisting of the national “Emergency Decree” and the “Nomad Plan” in Rome⁴. An extended examination of both measures is provided in the paper concerning Workpackage 2: “The Geography of (anti-)Racism and Tolerance: Local Policy Responses, Discrimination and Employment: Roma in Italy”.

Eventually, the paper will analyse the specific difficulties of establishing adequate policy responses for inclusion into the educational system. This section will be based on the analysis of European policy recommendations, national and communal inclusionary schemes and legislations and on our fieldwork, which consisted of 10 interviews conducted from March 2011 to October 2011 with exponents from institutions, anti-racist movements, grassroots organisations, journalists and individual activists, both Roma and non-Roma. Besides, interviews have been conducted with Roma living in various authorised camps in Rome, a procedure that is becoming more and more difficult due to the fact that municipal authorisations are needed to enter these statutory camps.

1. Anti-gypsyism

“The formation of multiple racisms within Europe, such as anti-Semitism and long established anti gypsy hostility, whose targets were internal groups, also confirms the need to interrogate intra-national forms of governance and social control” (Law 2010: 7)

Anti-gypsyism, the antagonism against Roma and Sinti people, is diffused throughout Europe and increased significantly in Italy in the 1990s (Vitale 2009: 89) compared to other European nations. Studies on anti-gypsyism emphasise “prejudice” as an essential element of this kind of racism. The most frequent prejudices include the image of the “gypsy” as a thief (92%), as someone living in a closed community (87%) who has chosen to live in camps on the periphery (83%) and who exploits his/her own children (92%) (ibid.).⁵ It is, however, crucial not to consider anti-gypsyism, as well as any other form of racism, as an individual disposition towards a “minority culture”, but as a structural paradigm of European societies. “Racial conception and racist practice are relational” (Goldberg 2009a: 1273). Racism is therefore defined here as a system

⁴ The national “Emergency Decree” has recently been judged as illegal and unfounded by the national Council of State, but until the drafting of this document no further actions have been planned. On the contrary, until now the plans of the “Nomad Plan” to establish a new “mega camp” in the extreme periphery are still pursued.

⁵ The data was collected in 2007, 2171 persons were interviewed, the sample was assembled in proportion to the distribution of the Italian population over 17 according to sex, age, level of education, occupation, geographic situation, size and location of domicile.

of unequal power relations that produces subordination and segregation of populations marked as inferior and thus conditions their access to social, economic, political, legal, psychological and cultural resources (Goldberg 2009a, 2009b). Following contemporary racial studies, one assumption is that race has been delinked from racism (Goldberg 2009b). The concept of race is still alive, except that it does not rely on biological racism but on cultural arguments (Amin 2010). The claim is that different values, practices and beliefs form distinctive traits and are irreconcilable with the values, practices and beliefs of the majority. The consequence is a depoliticisation of racism, marking 'the other' as deficient and unable or unwilling 'to integrate' and simultaneously keeping the member of the majority unmarked.

This is particularly striking in the case of the Roma, where a recurrent pattern is to blame "gypsy" culture, the "gypsies" that refuse to integrate, their alleged patriarchal organisation, their reluctance to let their children attend school and so forth. The denial of race places anti-racist movements and policies in a great dilemma, as will be demonstrated later in the report.

The Roma were an accepted minority until the 15th century, but with the breakdown of the medieval order and the emergence of a capitalist society in the pre-modern era, "gypsies" were outlawed. People were released from their traditional activities and began to travel as "vagabonds" and "beggars" (Scholz 2009: 25). This population was gradually considered to be unproductive (in capitalist terms) and politically not controllable. As a consequence, the Roma became the object of various kinds of persecution (Hund 2000 in: *ibid.*).

With the beginning of the Enlightenment, gradual racialisation of the prejudices against Roma set in, and with the establishment of nation-states "gypsies" were considered a racial threat to national stability. Campaigns of discipline and education were launched, Roma children were put into children's homes, and from the 20th century onwards registration with fingerprinting and photographing procedures were introduced (*ibid.*). Even though "gypsies" had lived in Europe for centuries, they were never considered to be a part of European society, but only to be *in* Europe. Their alleged origin from India is always mentioned and reiterated, and underlines their non-belonging to Europe. Similar to "the Jew", "the gypsy" has been considered ever since to be the internal enemy, a 'Europe's other' (Goldberg 2009b: 155) that has to be controlled since it was and is conceived as being a racial threat to the national body. It is noteworthy that public debates, institutions and anti-racist associations seldom focus on the status of the Roma as immigrants (often living in a camp for three generations), which has to be addressed in terms of documents (working permit, residence permit and so forth), housing and education. Various associations have agendas for

immigrants and “nomads” or Roma, the 13th Municipality of Rome has a department solely for “nomads”, while the Department for Education has one project for migrants and one for schooling the Roma⁶.

Emblematic is the case of the Roma who fled the wars in former Yugoslavia, especially those from Kosovo. Even though Italy and other European countries participated in this conflict in defence of human rights, the majority of these Roma were denied political asylum and/or status as war refugees, and instead given only temporary residence permits (Daniele 2009: 128).

A neat distinction is made between Roma and migrants, which underlines the idea of the Roma being in Europe but not being of Europe, as mentioned above. They are not treated as belonging to any other society either, but as a people apart from others.

Anti-gypsyism has a religious, social and a racialising dimension. It is religiously motivated because of the notion that Roma were accused of being traitors to Christendom (Law 2010: 7)⁷. Its social dimension is grounded in the belief that Roma travel around by their own will and not because they were forced to by persecution, that they maintain their living not by honest work but by stealing and tricking, leading to the conclusion that they are a plague or at least a “social problem”. It is racially motivated if the characteristics mentioned above are considered as applying to all “gypsies” and hereditary, hence a pattern of their “race” (Wippermann 2005). Besides, due to their (dark) skin colour they were associated with sin, dirt and evil and accused of being spies and carriers of the plague (Law 2010: 7). Since they lacked territorial, economic and military strength, their treatment as vulnerable scapegoats was facilitated, including mass murder, enslavement and removal of children from their families (Hancock 1997 in: *ibid.*).

Particularly persistent (Bravi and Sigona go so far as to speak of an “obsession”, 2006) is the idea that the Roma have to be educated and “socialised”. During the Nazi years, “gypsies” were considered to be mentally deficient, “asocial” and associated to the “*Lumpenproletariat*”, hence averse to work (Scholz 2009: 26).

In Italy, the physician, anthropologist and founder of the Italian School of Positivist Criminology Cesare Lombroso published his research “*L'uomo delinquente*” (“The delinquent man”) in 1876, in which he demonstrated that “the gypsy” was inclined by nature to be delinquent:

“[A]ccording to the anthropologist from Verona, the Roma committed crimes because they were naturally inclined to do so: they had no conscious will, but only evil tendencies dependent on their physical and psychological organisation, which differed from those of the

⁶ http://www.comune.roma.it/wps/portal/pcr?jppagecode=progetti_integ_scol_dses.wp

⁷ It was believed that they were direct descendants of the brother-murderer Cain, that they fabricated the nails for the cross of Christ and stole the fourth, that they had formed a pact with the Devil, from whom they learned their magical skills.

normal man. A similar interpretation could have only one consequence: the 'gypsy plague' could by no means be resolved through educative interventions, but had to be prevented, and persecution and the death penalty would constitute the only ways to stop it before it began. The 'asocial gypsy' hence assumed a hereditary and genetic connotation" (Bravi, Sigona 2006: 859-860).⁸

Lombroso's thesis was adopted by the scholars of the Institute of Racial Hygiene in the Third Reich (Robert Ritter, Adolf Würth, Eva Justin), who relied on this thesis in trying to establish the "*Wandertrieb*" gene, which allegedly determined the "gypsy" inclination to nomadism and led to their demonstration that "gypsies" were racially impure and fell into the category of life unworthy to live (Bravi, Sigona 2006: 860).

"Gypsy" concentration camps existed not only in Germany, but also in fascist Italy – however, their existence has undergone a national amnesia, as Sigona and Bravi point out – where the Roma were interned as socially and racially dangerous. In some of those camps, schools were set up for "gypsy" children, where they were to receive an "intellectual and religious education" to turn them into useful subjects for the fascist regime. It was only because of the armistice and the consequent chaos that the objectives devised for the "gypsy" detainees could be averted (ibid.: 862). While one obviously cannot draw any lines of simple continuity from that period to today, the will to re-educate the Roma seems a constant element in the relationship towards Roma. Those (re-)education efforts, with detention in camps, could offer a new way of deciphering the logic of today's camps⁹, with nursery schools for Roma children only, "socio-educational" services, and surveillance services. These images of Roma as a dangerous, deviant and asocial population are still in some ways persistent and mirrored in discourses against them and measures designed to help them.

In the 1960s and 70s, when the Roma and Sinti were stopped from settling in major cities of Northern Italy, the association Opera Nomadi (founded in 1963) established the so-called "Lacho Drom" classes, special classes for Roma children in the camps. These classes not only aimed at schooling Roma children, but were also intended as a kind of civilising process that would produce significant changes within

⁸ "Per l'antropologo veronese I rom delinquevano perché naturalmente incline a farlo: non esisteva una volontà cosciente, ma soltanto tendenze malvagie dipendenti dalla loro organizzazione fisica e psicologica differente da quella dell'uomo normale. Una simile interpretazione portava ad un'unica consequenziale soluzione: la "piaga zingara" non poteva essere risolta con alcun intervento educativo, oteva soltanto essere prevenuta e la persecuzione o la pena di morte potevano essere I soli mezzi per arrestarla sul nascere. La "asocialità zingara" aveva cioè assunto una connotazione genetica ed ereditaria" (Author's translation).

⁹ "Dalle prime esperienze rieducative in Ungheria fino ai campi di concentramento fascisti con le loro scuole, l'ossessione rieducativa rivolta verso la minoranza rom sembra accompagnarne costantemente le vicende storiche ed il rapporto con i non-zingari. Tale idea appare talmente strutturata e sedimentata all'interno degli schemi mentali della cultura dominante da veder riproporre lo stesso binomio campo-rieducazione anche all'interno di luoghi sorti per la persecuzione o addirittura come meta intermedia verso il genocidio. Simili avvenimenti rimossi, negate e taciuti dalla memoria collettiva consegnano una nuova chiave di lettura di fronte ai campi di oggi" (Bravi, Sigona 2006: 862) (Paraphrased; Author's translation).

the Roma community, since the Roma were considered to live in a state of marginality and inferiority and the education of their children was expected to lead to a maturation process within the whole community¹⁰ (Bravi, Sigona 2006: 863). A recent example, for what has been called the continuity of education and civilisation rhetoric and practice can be found in the terms of a bid in 2008 for the schooling service to be provided by the Rome Municipality. The authors of the text speak in the introduction of collaboration between associations and institutions to develop the capacity of young Roma to orientate themselves in modern society and interact positively with the community. Furthermore, the text underlines the importance of pre-schools, which would help the Roma child to acquire the skills and basic abilities to put him/her on the same cognitive level as all the other children. The anti-racist associations and activists, and “civilised” Roma themselves, also speak of projects and initiatives to teach the children basic civilised behaviour.

However, as Essed has pointed out,

“racism is [not] a natural... is a natural and permanent feature of European history; it is created and reproduced out of a complex set of conditions. Even when it draws on cultural and ideological remnants of previous historical processes, the specific forms racism takes are determined by the economic, political, social and organisational conditions of society” (Essed 1991: 12).

Racial categorisations are contingent and not fixed, they are products of certain historical events, like “conflicts, mis/recognitions, belongings, boundary drawing, imagining and forms of regulation” (Law 2010: 45). Categorisation of people along the notions of race, ethnicity are commonly used to construct an understanding of descent. The Roma identity has been understood and re-conceptualised in recent scientific debates (Vermeersch 2006 in: *ibid.*). They were seen as a historical diaspora, with common origins and descent from a military caste in India, and with a common language, Romani, and now scattered around the world (*ibid.*). This approach by the “classic ‘gypsyologist’, Nazi scientist and contemporary academics” has been contested by contemporary academics who criticise its “homogenising exoticism” (Oakely 1983, Vermeersch 2006: 14 in: *ibid.*). The presumed itinerant lifestyle, a specific set of cultural practices and musical traditions, were also seen as peculiar to Roma identity, without considering that in Eastern Europe Roma lived in settled communities and in houses. Despite the fact that categorisations and attempts to perform them are homogenising, the political mobilisation and activism by Roma to combat discrimination can only succeed, however, by categorizing and institutionalising Roma identity:

¹⁰ These “objectives” were noted by one of the volunteers in a “Lacio Drom” class.

"Identity, category and names matter here and they are vitally important in the struggle for fundamental rights" (Law 2010: 47).

Racism is, as our interviews show, always intended as an individual attitude. Racism is also considered to be a "problem" of ignorance and intolerance. It is difficult to talk about racism, since it is also considered as being "too heavy" or even "wrong" as a concept, as we have been told. Our interviewees preferred to talk about "intolerance" or "xenophobia" rather than racism. What is at stake, then, is the conceptualisation of anti-racist policies that consequently have to operate on a non-existing ground. The uneasiness with the concept of race is due the non-acceptance of racism as a historical legacy. Italian anti-racist discourse has never critically addressed the country's own economic migration or its own "racism" towards the population of the south (Schneider 1998 in: Lentin 2004: 165) and the internal colonisation process. The problem of racism is completely externalised and construed as entirely new and affecting only non-Italians (ibid.). The non-consideration of internal racism and the non-consideration of a racialisation process within Italy's "own" national body have led to the imagination of "racism" as a new phenomenon that arrived in the country with the (significant) influx of the first immigrants in the 1980s (Balbo, Manconi 1990 in ibid.: 166). The anti-racist movement can be said to have been born in those years and to have been mainly concerned with the phenomenon of immigration. Since anti-racism was and still is connected to immigration, "the force of anti-racism is often determined by the parallel force of opposition to a government seen as proactively promoting anti-immigration policies" (Lentin 2004: 171).

Anti-racist organisations in Italy are for the most part made up of 'white' Italians, and there is a lack of major organisations composed of "Italians" and "immigrants" together, which undoubtedly demonstrates the importance of challenging the externalisation of racism (ibid.):

"There are migrants' organisations, acting in the interest of particular communities or intercultural groups [...], whose remit is clearly anti-racist. Trade unions, centri sociali, advocacy organisations and ARCI are committed to anti-racism. In the promotion of anti-racism, these types of organisation often call upon a representative of any one of the former groups to relate their experiences of racism, to discuss the role of their organisation or to assist in the planning of a demonstration. It is in this sense that racism is externalised, as a problem facing an 'other' – straniero, extracomunitario – who, when she leaves the anti-racist rally, takes racism away with her" (Lentin 2004: 169).

This can be exemplified in the case of the Roma in Rome. There are the 'gadjo' ('Italian') organisations that run a pro Roma agenda and the Roma associations that try to establish themselves with various agendas (some of the goals are: inclusion of Romni, art and culture, theatre, social promotion of the Roma and Sinti population). There are four Roma associations: Romni Onlus, Roma Onlus, Unirsi, Phrale Europa

and Theatre Rom. One of these associations is run by a Romni and consists only and explicitly of Romni members. This association promotes women's rights and tries to involve the women from the camps. The other associations are a bit bigger, but far from being as big (in terms of importance and number of members) as the gadjo associations. Some also include gadjo members, while others explicitly exclude gadjos. However, there are no important mixed associations, and this has prompted several complaints by Roma activists. Their involvement in the big associations is mainly related to their training as "cultural mediators" for the schooling service or as "experts" serving the Roma in associations, political parties and the like. The role of these mediating agents will be illustrated later on in the report.

Closeness to the political left hampered, for example, a big mobilisation against the establishment of the "villages of solidarity" (equipped "nomad camps"¹¹ in peripheral areas) and the beginning of evictions during the city's centre-left administration, leading instead to collaboration between the associations in the management of the camps, and the schooling service for children, which began in the mid-90s.

Another problem of the Italian anti-racist movement is that concerns with immigration issues were initially a big success, but led to a crisis once the laws on immigration were achieved in 1998 (Lentin 2004:174). Besides, the anti-racist movement has a highly theoretical and generalised approach (including a critique of globalization and neo-imperialism) that produces difficulties in establishing innovative and coherent responses to the right-wing government on anti-racist policies (ibid.).

The splintered movement consisting of "white Italian" associations on the one hand, immigrant associations on the other, and loose organisations, pushes anti-racists towards collaboration with supra-national associations like amnesty international or ENAR, instead of forming a "cohesive national movement with adequate strategies for the campaign against the increasing institutionalisation of racism" (Lentin 2004: 174). This development is criticised by several Roma activists in Rome, who lament the way the different associations pursue their rivalries instead of organising a common demonstration, for example. The splintered anti-racist and pro Roma movement has created a competitive situation amongst the associations, which ultimately has not much helped the Roma cause (overcoming the camps, occupation, schooling and health care).

"The problem of the associations here in Rome is that they don't share a common objective concerning the Roma question. Every association has its own ideas and the climate has become very competitive. This is a problem, because a common strategy would be needed and would also be more effective than the actual strategies the associations are pursuing" (Chairman Welfare ARCI Nazionale).

¹¹ The chapter "The Nomad Camp" offers an overview of the different labels and definitions of those camps.

What is at stake is not a failure to denounce racism against the Roma – on the contrary, the EU and other supra-national institutions (OSCE, FRA) have shown great concern for the situation of the Roma, and established programmes and initiatives (e.g. the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020)¹², and denounce the exclusion and marginalisation of Roma¹³. However, when it comes to inclusion in the labour market, housing and schooling, only little seems to have changed. The circumstances the Roma live in can indeed be described as an emergency, as the Italian government did, but in our opinion as a humanitarian emergency, at least as far as the Roma in Rome are concerned. Basic needs are often not met (clean water, electricity, access to public services etc.), the legal status of many inhabitants is unclear, health conditions are serious, education and employment rates are very low, so that any attempt to solve the situation has to start with alleviating these.

As shown above, what is missing is a more comprehensive understanding of anti-racist policy that does not restrict racism to immigrants. It is the lack of such policies, the failure to consider racism as part of Italy's historical legacy and as a structural phenomenon that influences institutions, public bodies and civil society associations, that continues to make it difficult to tackle effectively the multiple injustices Roma face today.

2. Schooling for 'little nomads'

“Another point is that they are poor in terms of cultural capital. You can't ask someone who has lived for 30/40 years in a camp in Italy about Roma culture. Knowledge is missing. The Cergarja, who came to Italy from Bosnia in the 1960s, belong to the lowest social stratum of the Roma. They don't have any political culture. Working with them is very hard. That includes employment. I've always told them that they need education if they want to change things” (ARCI Member)

On 11 April 2011, the European Commission issued the Communication “An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020”, requesting the Member States to set up substantial inclusionary strategies for the Roma population,

¹² http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/122100.pdf

¹³ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR); OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) (2008): Assessment of the Human Rights Situation of Roma and Sinti in Italy. Report of a fact-finding mission to Milan, Naples and Rome on 20-26 July 2008; European Parliament: Motion for a resolution on the census of the Roma on the basis of ethnicity in Italy <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=B6-2008-0348&language=EN>; FRA: Violent attacks against Roma in the Ponticelli district of Naples http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Incid-Report-Italy-08_en.pdf

since measures and strategies to date have not had the expected impact in this field. The European Commission expects an “[I]ncreasing awareness of the Roma issue at the highest level of government” that “should [...] be a fundamental objective of the proposed European Strategy towards the Roma” (EU Parliament 2011: 52).

Particularly important for a successful inclusion of the Roma into mainstream society is the education sector – and particularly striking is the fact that, even though supranational, national and local institutions and NGOs have been committed to supporting the Roma, efforts to combat racism and segregation in schools “in a substantive and substantial manner” have failed (ibid.: 13).

Italy has a three-tier governance structure that decentralises powers to the Regions, Provinces and Municipalities. The Regions elaborate their own laws and programmes, and implement policies put in place on a national level. The Municipalities and Provinces in turn can draw up local programmes addressing the inclusion of the Roma population (Report EU Parliament 2011: 55). To some extent representatives of the Roma are involved in the decision-making process on a regional and local level. Programmes and initiatives for the inclusion of the Roma are only poorly developed, and the existing ones are mostly significant on a regional or local level, “usually focusing on just one or more policy areas, and usually delivered through uncoordinated and discrete projects with variable funding” (ibid.: 56).

It is the case that the most useful initiatives and programmes for Roma inclusion concern the education sector. The institution that supervises policy in the educational sector is the MIUR (Ministry of Public Education) and its General Directorate for Student Integration. The Ministry is in communication with the regional offices and their education institutions. The implementing agencies are the regional Education Offices, local bodies and the NGOs (EU Parliament 2011: 96). Italy lacks a main strategic document for the social inclusion of its Roma population as well as an action plan for its implementation.

Due to the decentralised Italian governance system, regional and local Education Offices compete over many tasks. Within these regional and local initiatives, there was a programme for training Roma and Sinti cultural and linguistic mediators to work in schools as a support for both the children and the teachers. Furthermore, special training programmes have been established for schools with high numbers of Roma and Sinti pupils, educational and information materials have been created to promote school inclusion, particularly at the primary level, along with “the use of didactic cards and photocopies from textbooks, the development of study records and assessment cards for Roma pupils as well as provision for some individualized interventions to

provide support both inside school and in addition to the school day” (ibid.). This provision must nonetheless be analysed critically, as will be shown below.

The measures taken are supervised and monitored by Office VI of the General Direction for Student Integration on an annual basis, with the option of adopting new monitoring strategies for schools in high immigration areas.

Finally, it has to be stressed that due to decentralised governance, the Regions, Provinces and local authorities can all adopt measures of their own for the inclusion of minority groups in the educational system. Moreover, each school has autonomy in relation to the educational agenda. Therefore, regional differences emerge over initiatives for the inclusion of Roma pupils in schools, mirrored in diverging drop-out rates of Roma children. Some Regions have adopted more efficacious inclusionary programmes than others, which underlines the need for stronger national coordination of the various policy responses.

The situation for Roma children in Italian camps is very depressing. The children are mostly subjected to systemic discrimination. Only a small number of children complete primary school, and drop-out rates increase with each school level. Other interrelated factors contribute to low school attendance, such as poor living conditions, high rates of unemployment, substandard housing and poor access to health services (FRA 2006: 6), as well as low confidence in state institutions, language barriers, and resistance by “Italian” families to having Roma children integrated in their children’s classes (EU Report 2011: 96). The constant threat of forced evictions undermines regular school attendance, as reported in the eviction phase of Casilino 900, when many children did not attend school because they were about to face eviction. Another problem is the lack of documents, which stops many parents from sending their children to school, even though Italian legislation underlines the children’s right, regardless of legal status, to attend school, and their parents’ obligation to see that they do.

2.1. The legal framework for “foreign” and particularly Roma and Sinti pupils

The first national legislation on inclusion in the education sector was issued in the 1960s, when the Ministry of Public Education found an agreement with Opera Nomadi and the University of Padua to establish the so-called Lacho Drom classes, special classes for Roma and Sinti children (see above) (COSPE Roma, Sinti, Gypsies and Travellers in public education 2004: 6). The assumption at that time was that the children lacked basic values and “that therefore schooling of gypsy children had to have primarily a re-educational function imparting in children the characteristics

considered essential in school life and learning, such as respect for health and behavioural rules and norms” (ibid.: 9).

Twenty years later, compulsory schooling for Roma and Sinti children was established. The Ministry of Public Education issued its Circular no. 207 of 16 July 1986 on “Educating gypsy and nomad pupils in nursery, primary and secondary schools”¹⁴, underlining that education of the nomads was “a problem” that remained unsolved to date, even though various initiatives had been implemented. The Circular underlined the bilateral obligation for compulsory schooling, with attention paid to the cultural identity of the targeted population and consideration of their needs.

“Underlining that the gypsies and nomads as well as all others residing on Italian territory have the full right to access to public schools, even if they lack citizenship, it has to be stressed that any hostility or diffidence constitutes a blatant violation of the constitutional and civil principles of the Italian State.”

The Circular notes also that any request for enrolment has to be treated as a request to begin a “relationship” with the national institution and must be read as a wish to integrate into Italian society. This is particularly valid for “foreign citizens”, for whom the right/obligation to education is equally valid¹⁵. The Circular finally stresses that “gypsy and nomad” pupils are not to be regarded as disabled persons, but as persons subject to socio-cultural disadvantages. This requires the didactical approach to teaching to be flexible, seeking greater participation by all pupils, in the context of all-day schooling. The Circular was followed by two others from the same Ministry (301/89 and 205/90) that pursued the same objectives and were reinforced by an intercultural perspective (COSPE 2004: 6). Unfortunately, these circulars, that were intended to ensure the compulsory schooling of the Roma and Sinti population, have never been concretely implemented, which may be due to a general failure to implement public policies (ibid.).

A Resolution on school provision for gypsy and traveller children¹⁶ adopted at the Education Council of the EEC on 22 May 1989 declared that:

“The Council and the Ministers for Education, meeting within the Council, will strive to promote a set of measures concerning school provision for gypsy and traveller children aimed, without prejudice to any steps already taken by Member States to cope with specific situations which they face in this area, at developing a global structural approach helping to overcome the major obstacles to the access of gypsy and traveller children to schooling.”

¹⁴ Scolarizzazione degli alunni zingari e nomadi nella scuola materna, elementare e secondaria di I grado

¹⁵ “Nel sottolineare che gli zingari e i nomadi così come tutti coloro che risiedono sul territorio italiano hanno innanzitutto un pieno diritto di accedere alle nostre scuole, anche se privi della cittadinanza è bene ribadire che ogni ostilità o diffidenza costituisce una palese violazione dei principi costituzionali e civili dello Stato italiano.

Ogni richiesta di iscrizione, pertanto, deve essere accolta con la massima considerazione tenendo conto che, al di là di ogni rilevanza strettamente giuridica, manifesta una volontà di instaurare un più corretto rapporto tra le istituzioni nazionali e le minoranze interessate che aspirano ad un pieno inserimento nella nostra società. Ciò vale con maggior ragione per coloro che sono cittadini stranieri, nei confronti dei quali, ovviamente, sussiste il diritto/dovere all’istruzione” (Author’s translation and paraphrasing).

¹⁶ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:41989X0621%2801%29:EN:HTML>

This Resolution goes on to stress that the culture and the language of the Roma have been part of the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Community for over 500 years, and therefore need to be respected (COSPE 2004: 7). The Resolution was then acknowledged in several regional laws and projects.

With Circular no. 205 of 26 July 1990 (“La scuola dell’obbligo e gli alunni stranieri. L’educazione interculturale”/ “Compulsory schooling and foreign pupils: Intercultural Education”), the Ministry of Public Education moved towards intercultural pedagogics and education. In 1991, Act no. 176 on the Ratification and Implementation of the Rights of the Child was adopted. It was followed in 1992 and 1993 by documents drawn up by the National Council of Public Education that established an inter-departmental working group for intercultural education and the integration of foreign students within the General Directorate for Primary Education at the Ministry of Public Education. This issued policy documents illustrating an intention to move towards an intercultural approach in education (ibid.:11). Roma and Sinti cultural mediators were trained to work in various schools in order to ensure mutual respect and knowledge between different “cultures”. However, this initiative has not been followed up properly (ibid.). Eventually in 1994 a Circular from the Ministry of Public Education established access to public schooling for children with a permit to stay (EU Parliament: 96).

Important steps towards schooling “foreign” pupils were taken with the Immigration Act of 1998 and its amendment in 2002 (known as the Bossi-Fini Law) (see below). Law 275/99 D.P.R underlines the autonomy of schools and this is the main instrument for the “integration of the foreigners that request specific solutions” (MIUR 2006: 4). Amendments to the legislation governing the organisation of the school system, enacted as Law no. 53/2003, called for an individual approach and didactic methods geared to the needs of each pupil (ibid.). Finally, Section 1 of Legislative Decree no. 76/2005 enshrines the right/duty of education and training, broadening the scope of the obligations set out in Section 68 of Law 144/99 to cover “everyone, including underage foreigners living on State territory” (ibid.).

Measures to support teachers in guaranteeing the integration of “foreign and/or nomad” pupils were taken in 1999, 2001 and 2002 under the “Contratto Collettivo Nazionale Lavoro – Comparto Scuola” – the National Collective Agreement for the Education Sector. The C.C.N.L. Action Plan provided a normative framework to counter marginalisation in schools. It transferred competences from central to regional offices and tightened the cooperation between individual educational institutions (ibid.:5).

2009 saw the launch of the “Open School” programme, with funding worth €6 million divided among the Regional Education offices. Almost a thousand schools

participated. The aim of the programme was to teach Italian to newly arrived school-age children at primary and secondary level (ibid.: 97).

Another initiative aimed specifically at the Roma and Sinti population was a New Protocol signed with Opera Nomadi to support the inclusion of Roma children, whether Italian citizens or not, in state-run schools. The aim was to train teachers and heads of schools in collaboration with local bodies. There has also been a recent initiative by the General Directorate, consisting of national measures to support training for the integration “of foreign and Roma and Sinti pupils in the area of intercultural education” (Report EU Parliament 2011: 97).

2.2. Intercultural Education as defined by the General Directorate for Student Integration

According to the guidelines of the Ministry of Public Education (2006), Italian schools are becoming a place of education for different citizenships within a European horizon, rooted in the national identity, able to promote the various local identities, and bringing all the different cultures together in a dialogue within a framework of shared values (MIUR 2006: 3). Intercultural education should be considered as the foundation upon which to establish the schooling and training of foreign pupils. School is considered as the place where common rules are shared and established, and where knowledge provides the basis for the creation of “social citizenship” (ibid.). The concept of intercultural education rejects the logic of assimilation, as well as the establishment of closed ethnic communities, and is instead oriented towards mutual understanding, confrontation and dialogue through the cohabitation of differences (ibid.: 4). Intercultural education is not an “optional” dimension, but must be seen as a transversal thread that brings together teachers and school operators (ibid.: 15). This “cultural pluralism” and the “complexity of our time” require school personnel to pursue “continuous professional growth”. Therefore the ground must be adequately prepared during initial teacher training (ibid.). Ministerial Directive no. 45 of 4 April 2005 provides for training modules related to the integration of “foreign pupils”. Of paramount importance is training in the teaching of Italian as a second language (“L2”), for which the MIUR has prepared a national project to train specialist teachers (ibid.).

With regard to the enrolment of “foreign pupils”, the guidelines refer to the right/duty of education (Section 68 of Law no. 144 of 17 May 1999, repeated in Section 2 of Law no. 53/2003 and Section 1 of Legislative Decree no. 76 of 15 April 2005 on the right/duty of education). It extends to underage persons between 15 and 18 years of age, regardless of their legal status. (Compulsory schooling in Italy lasts 8 years, of which 5 years of primary school and 3 years of first-level secondary school). Pupils

with an unclear or irregular legal status are to be granted conditional enrolment, but this must not hinder the completion of their studies (ibid.: 7).

Crucial for the successful inclusion of “foreign” pupils are continuous training for school personnel and dialogue with the parents, if necessary with the support of cultural and linguistic mediators (ibid.: 9-10). The cultural and linguistic mediators are important figures in the process of including “foreigners” in the school system. Opting for cultural mediation is left to the autonomous decision of each school.

On the didactic aspects of educational methods, the guidelines stress the need to cooperate with the cultural and linguistic mediators. To guarantee full inclusion, pupils should spend all their time at school with their class group, except when taking part in specific individual didactic programmes (MIUR 2006: 10-11). The guidelines recommend the creation and use of teaching aids based on “cultural pluralism” and an “intercultural” approach. The choice of these didactic materials lies within the competence of the school. However, the guidelines stress the use of didactical materials and books in original versions, or bilingual or trilingual texts, dictionaries, multimedia aids in different languages, “autobiographies of immigrants and Italian emigrants”, and also partnerships with immigrants’ and intercultural associations (ibid.:17). Particularly important is the broadening of school libraries to include a “pluricultural dimension” (ibid.).

“As a consequence, a pedagogically founded approach to knowledge of the most highly qualified expressions and artistic achievements of the different peoples is essential, also with a view to recognising civilisations and universal human values. These approaches and didactical instruments will be addressed to the school community as a whole and not exclusively to the foreign pupils”¹⁷ (ibid.: 18).

The guidelines do not define either the concepts of interculture, pluriculturalism and multiculturalism, or the concept of intercultural education and the methods on which it should be based. It seems important to note that personalised study programmes can be adopted in order to guarantee the inclusion of the pupil into the class and school context. As far as intercultural preparation is concerned, the document does not offer any specific actions or recommendations. Regarding anti-racist measures, the document makes no reference to racism as such, but underlines the need for dialogue between the school institution and the child/parents, possibly supported by cultural and linguistic mediators. Particularly important is the teaching of the Italian language, seen as the guarantee for a successful school career and inclusion within the majority, without neglecting the mother tongue, which is considered to be important for cognitive

¹⁷ “Di conseguenza sarà necessario un approccio pedagogicamente fondato alla conoscenza delle più qualificate espressioni e conquiste artistiche e scientifiche dei diversi popoli, anche nell’ottica di una valorizzazione delle civiltà e dei valori umani universali. Questi approcci e strumenti didattici saranno rivolti alla comunità scolastica e non esclusivamente agli allievi stranieri” (Author’s translation).

and emotional development. However, even if not explicitly, the guidelines underline the “hosts” responsibility for a successful integration into mainstream society.

2.3. Anti-racism in national education policy

The National Observatory for the Integration of Foreign Pupils and Intercultural Education (hereinafter NOII), a body attached to the Ministry of Public Education, subsequently published “The Italian way towards intercultural education and integration of foreign pupils” in 2007, with clearer statements on the concept of intercultural education and on racism in schools.

Measures for “intercultural interaction”, i.e. interventions promoting encounters between different cultures, social cohesion, and conditions for intercultural exchange, target educational operators, but they also refer to relations between school and extra-curricular hours, discrimination and prejudices, and an intercultural focus in the teaching of knowledge and competences (NOII 2007: 10). The “intercultural perspective” is intended as “the promotion of dialogue and confrontation between cultures”, reaching beyond the simple organisation required to integrate immigrant pupils or specific compensatory measures (ibid.: 3). Intercultural education is defined here as education for diversity (ibid.:16).

“When we began with our laboratories for the Roma children in schools, we tried to involve Italian pupils as well. So yes, by learning to know the other, we tried to deconstruct prejudices” (ARCI member).

The actions are aimed at school boards, networks of schools, civil society organisations, training of for (teaching) personnel, but also countering “discrimination and prejudices”. Stereotypes are defined as simplified images or representations that preserve a difference in favour of the group that uses them. Prejudices are seen as opinions and attitudes shared by one group towards another group that may lead to avoiding the members of a certain group.

“Stereotypes, prejudices, forms of ethnocentrism may trigger xenophobia or real racism, in its different forms and on different levels (forms of institutional, scientific or non-theorised racism that is equally dangerous)”¹⁸ (NOII 2007: 16).

Anti-racist education, therefore, should be considered within a broader spectrum of intercultural education, even if it is not the same thing. Anti-racist education in schools should seek to combat anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-Gypsyism (NOII 2007: 16). Combating racism through education should prevent the construction of the other as an enemy.

¹⁸ “Stereotipi, pregiudizi, forme di etnocentrismo pos- sono fare da elemento scatenante della xenofobia o del vero e proprio razzismo, nelle sue varie forme e livelli (da quello istituzionale a quello scientifico a quello non teorizzato ma ugualmente pericoloso)” (Author’s translation).

“Intercultural education has to include the anti-racist dimension, otherwise the pedagogic approach would be ‘naïve’, out of touch with reality and the problem of discrimination. On the other hand, if education were merely anti-racist, it would incur the risk of only considering the socio-political dimension, ignoring broader implications”¹⁹.

That is why the MIUR speaks of intercultural education, which includes the formulation of strategies to counter anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-Gypsyism within a broader “global framework of encounters between people of different cultures” (ibid.) and which should function to prevent racism and intolerance (ibid.:23). Considering knowledge as a tool for the prevention of racism implies seeing racism as a consequence of wrong information, ignorance and wrong attitudes. “Racism is often entrenched in commonsense understandings about ‘ability’, ‘aptitude’, ‘the right attitude’, etc.” (Gillborn 2004: 45). What is missing, then, is to consider racism as a structural paradigm, and what emerges is an underestimation of the complexities of racism. The danger of the “intercultural” agenda lies in the reiteration of differences that will perpetuate forms of exclusion:

“[W]hen legislation adopts a de-racialised discourse, for example, by espousing a desire to help ‘all’ children regardless of ethnic origin, the consequences of reform have almost invariably been to remake differences that further entrench and extend all too familiar patterns of exclusion and oppression (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000)” (Gillborn 2004: 45).

2.4. Discrimination of Roma pupils

The amendment to the Immigration Act in 2009 includes an obligation to show a residence permit when requesting “licenses, authorisations, registrations and other measures” at administrative public bodies (ASGI 2009: 1). Before this reform, Law 286/98 established some exceptions to this obligation, e.g. requests for documents about the (relationship) status of a person (birth, marriage, death) and access to public services (particularly social services, education, health care) and leisure or sport activities. The former law explicitly banned denouncing the irregular status of an immigrant when that person was using health care services. The reform of 2009 modified the exceptions, and the obligation to exhibit a residence permit is now only waived for leisure/sport activities, health care services and compulsory schooling (ibid.). In all the other cases in which an immigrant requests an official document or any other public service, he/she has to exhibit a residence permit. This is due to the fact that recent immigration legislation makes it an offence to enter or remain on Italian territory by irregular means.

¹⁹“L’educazione interculturale deve comprendere la dimensione dell’antirazzismo, altrimenti si avrebbero istanze pedagogiche “ingenua”, prive di contatto con la realtà delle problematiche della discriminazione; dove ci si limitasse all’antirazzismo, invece, si rischierebbe di limitarsi ad affrontare la dimensione socio-politica del pensiero prevenuto, ignorandone le implicazioni più ampie” (Author’s translation).

School attendance is compulsory for the first and second cycle of education, starting with nursery school and ending with the conclusion of secondary school or with vocational training (ibid.)²⁰. The obligation to exhibit a residence permit is also waived for individuals who attain the age of 18 while still in school or vocational training. Since the school authorities have to enrol minors regardless of their legal status, they are not authorised to ask for the legal status of the minor's parents. If they do so, they might be accused of violating the law. Nonetheless, the legislation can cause confusion and create a dilemma for the school authorities, because while they must not report the legal status of the child and/or the parents, they are simultaneously obliged to do so when in possession of certain proofs of a person's "illegal" status (although this in turn would infringe the child's right to be schooled). Nonetheless, interpretation of the legislation is some ways complicated, and no clarification has been forthcoming from the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Home Affairs. As a consequence, this will certainly mean that various City Councils will adopt a very restrictive application of the reform. Besides, a circular from the Ministry of Public Education (2010) set out some criteria allowing schools to refuse the enrolment of non-Italian children, in order to avoid the proportion of non-Italians in each class and school exceeding 30% (Rozzi 2009: 4)²¹.

Roma children suffer from discrimination at school, which may infringe their right to a schooling. Many Roma children are not enrolled in schools. Often the school attendance of those who are enrolled is very irregular, and as a consequence their performance is very poor, which in turn leads to the fact that many Roma children only complete the first level of secondary schooling ("Scuola Media", three years following five years of primary school) (Rozzi 20010: 1).

"It's difficult to bring forward a process of integration in the literal sense of the word. We've worked with the associations on inclusion in the employment and education sector. We've evaluated initiatives taken to avoid the educational warp for Roma and Sinti children. They surely do have a way of life and a way to relate within their families, very distinct from ours, and this is an obstacle to mutual dialogue. It's often the parents themselves who are not inclined to send their children to school, often because it's almost no use.

The only initiative of the local administrations, like the one in Rome, is simply to go and pick the children up and bring them to school, maybe from the camp on via Pontina²² to the city centre, so that they arrive late and are isolated even more from the normal run of school. There is also no adequate preparation of teachers to mediate between these children, who come from a very particular reality, and their Italian classmates. The result is depressing, the children feel like fish out of water, they are isolated and alien to school life. They are mocked because they're dirty and don't wash, because they don't study, and so they see school as an unbearable imposition and don't want to go there.

²⁰ "Ciò significa che solo con il conseguimento del titolo di scuola superiore o con quello di qualifica professionale si può considerare concluso per il soggetto interessato il „sistema educativo di istruzione e formazione“, ovvero sia l'esercizio del diritto all'istruzione e formazione" (Author's translation).

²¹ However, the circular establishes that the school can ask for some exceptions, e.g. for non-Italian children who were born in Italy but have sufficient competence in the Italian language, or else the quota can be raised if the school has adequate support structures for the children to teach them Italian.

²² The camp on via Pontina is also known as Castel Romano on the Pontina road.

What we criticise is that investment is only made in transportation to and from school. It would be better to prepare the teachers, to organise discussions with the parents, to find more adequate instruments for teaching these children and training them for work. It's not easy to achieve these goals, especially when the City Council is from the right, like the one in Rome, and they lack any interest in integrating these children. They focus on enclosed and controlled camps, where they transfer people. In my opinion this is neither a serious, nor a correct policy." (UIL member)

"This year, I am in a Roma camp, I work with some families, some children and I am beginning a professional relationship with them; but next year, from January on, the tender procedure will be concluded and I don't know where, with which community, in which camp I will work then, so for me, this tender system the City Council has is wrong. It's annual now and it doesn't offer quality, it's just a sign of good will; it doesn't support the quality of the projects, it's just a thing which has to be done, but the right of the child to receive instruction and education ... well, things could be made much better, with just some effort things could be really much better. For me, this way of organising these kinds of project is a clear symptom that there is no will to give a certain service and support to the client – they call them clients. It's just resolving an emergency, in order not to..." (Teacher, cultural mediator and operator in one of the big associations providing schooling services)

"I don't understand it, but I think it's their culture. They don't want the children to be schooled, they are afraid that they will become traitors to their culture, especially the girls. So, after elementary school, they take the children out of school" (Activist and researcher)

"The teachers don't know anything about Roma culture, about the situation these children live in. I think if I was a teacher in a school, I'd go and learn about Roma culture, how I should relate to the child to 'reach him/her', and so many children refuse to go to school, they don't feel good there, they suffer because they are different and treated as different. I see them at school and then at the camp, and at the camp I see that they are different. They block themselves at school. They censor, isolate and marginalise themselves at school. All this integration process is very slow, there is no project for their integration, a kind of intercultural education would be needed" (Teacher, cultural mediator and operator in one of the big associations providing schooling services).

The causes of the persistent discrimination at school are multiple, as already outlined. Different types of discriminations overlap with regard to housing, employment, education and health care, which creates a very complex situation. Socio-economic factors, the legal status of many Roma and therefore fear of the authorities, precarious living conditions, evictions, a lack of interest and responsibility on the part of the authorities, as well as the attitude of many parents towards the authorities, all create an entanglement of causes, the consequence of which is that the right to education is neither guaranteed by the authorities nor claimed by the parents themselves (Rozzi 2010: 2). The forced evictions in particular create an obstacle to regular and focused school attendance.

"The increasingly frequent evictions from the spontaneous (also "irregular" or "illegal") settlements and the lack of adequate housing alternatives, very frequently abruptly interrupt the schooling of these children; the absolute lack of services (water, electricity) in those settlements renders it very difficult for the parents to send the children to school washed and well dressed; the location of the camps in isolated urban areas, badly connected to the public transportation services, implies an objective difficulty in reaching the schools; the condition of extreme poverty forces minors to contribute to the livelihoods of their families, which in turn impedes regular school attendance"(Rozzi 2010: 2)

"Yeah, there are difficulties, because when I go to wait for my girls to pick them up from school I'm always looked at by the other mums, because I'm not dressed like them, I seem not to be a real "signora". I appear to be nothing but a poor thing and that's why they made a big mistake, the City Council, in removing the bus that took the children to school, because you see the difference. The children always see this thing and ask me, 'Mummy, what is going on? What have you done? Why are you so sad?' Also when I go to speak with the teachers about my girls how they are doing at school, or even if I don't go, for them it's the same, they don't care, they just say, 'everything's ok, signora, don't you worry', and that's it" (Romni 1, lives in a caravan in an authorised camp, 4 children).

Another factor which contributes to poor school attendance is that the Roma girls and boys know that they will not be given big opportunities, and so they question the duty and right to attend school, since, they claim, it will not help to improve their living conditions (Rozzi 2010: 6).

Besides, schools tend to negate the identities of the children and propagate an assimilationist and ethnocentric education (ibid.), largely responding to the children and their parents with a racist attitude – which also contributes to their alienation from school – instead of proposing and acting out an “intercultural” and therefore (in terms of the MIUR) anti-racist agenda.

The most frequent discriminations occur in relation to enrolment, special support services, and enforcement of the right/duty to attend school. In the case of enrolment, direct discrimination is frequent, with some schools trying to discourage the enrolment of Roma children, often considered to be “problematic”. This, in combination with the 30% rule, may lead to a further exclusion of the Roma children from schooling. Also, irregular status is often used as an argument against the enrolment of the children, like the failure to present an official registration card. Finally, the lack of official registration impedes enrolment for municipal services, such as kindergartens. If children who do possess an official registration occupy all the available places, then the ones without this document will be excluded (Rozzi 2010: 6). This particularly affects Roma children in the “illegal” camps. Some City Councils make exceptions to the rule, if the gravity of the situation is reported by the social services, but this procedure does not apply to all City Councils, and leads to a de facto exclusion of the Roma children from nursery school even though various supranational organisations have recommended nursery schools and all other pre-school institutions as fundamental to a successful education of Roma children (ibid.).

Italy has witnessed the so-called “Lacho Drom” classes, classes only for Roma children living in the camps, which were often established in church parishes (Calabrò 2008: 140). It was not until 1965 that these classes were included in state schools, but nonetheless they retained their own hours, and had their own canteens with different food for the children. The teachers in these classes worked without any pay. In 1971 the first attempts were made to include the Roma children in regular classes, a procedure which was concluded in 1974. The “Lacho Drom” classes remained and were reserved for children with serious difficulties or those who came irregularly due to their itinerant lifestyle. Now special classes are banned, but nevertheless there are still so-called support teachers, who work with children who have fallen behind or children with disabilities. All children have to attend a common class, and the Ministry of

Education emphatically welcomes different forms of diversity (gender diversity, children with diverse abilities and diverse social origins) (Rozzi 2010: 7) – a notion which underlines the universalistic approach of the Italian school.

Special classes do not exist, but laboratories have been established for the support of “foreign” children and Roma, helping them to catch up with the Italian language or other school subjects. It is mostly some association to run these laboratories during school time, so that the children who attend miss shared lessons.

“The operators in the laboratories are mostly organizers with a socio-cultural training. Sometimes there are also anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists. The heart of these activities is and aim was and is to entertain the children. We offered many various activities, sports, musical and artistic activities, drama, and so forth and this is still the main aim of the laboratories” (ARCI member)

De facto, the laboratories are aimed at supporting Roma children. “Some Roma children spend the whole of elementary school in these laboratories.” In practice the laboratories are still special classes, and are mainly used for children from the camps²³, even if some of these activities target at including Roma and non-Roma children.

Finally, discrimination occurs in the monitoring of compulsory school attendance. There are very harsh punishments, which can endanger the whole family nucleus, for those parents who do not send their children to school (Rozzi 2010: 7). The Roman Municipality, for example, threatens parents with taking their children away if they refuse to send them to school.

On the other hand, there is an acceptance of non-compliance in the name of multiculturalism, when authorities argue that schooling is not part of Roma culture (ibid.:14).

“Primary schooling is a human right and an essential precondition for active participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of a country. The right/duty to a schooling therefore has to be guaranteed for every minor, regardless of the culture they belong to” (Rozzi 2010: 15).

2.5. “My little son paints very well” – Roma children at school

The following section reports some extracts from interviews with Roma in one authorised camp on the subject of schooling for certain children²⁴. The first interview was with Magdalena, a 14-year-old girl who lives in a caravan with her grandmother and her two sons. They live in an authorised camp that lacks access to public transport. The girl was transferred to this camp after the dismantling of Casilino 900 in

²³ There are two forms of laboratories according to Liégeois: a) special classes, which substitute the regular classes and where the Roma are confined throughout their school attendance, b) temporary special classes, where the children spend part of their school time, the rest being spent in the regular class. The aim is that special and regular lessons should complement each other, and differential treatment should focus on promoting equal opportunities. Consequently these measures should be “appropriate”, “necessary”, and “proportionate”, and not stigmatizing (Liégeois, Jean-Pierre (2007): Roma in Europe, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 178 in Rozzi, Elena (2010): 8-9.)

²⁴ The interviews were conducted in collaboration with Andrea Anzaldi of Associazione 21 Luglio.

2010 and she deeply regrets it. Magdalena goes to the “Scuola Media”. Every morning the special bus for the camp comes, picks the children up and takes them to the various schools, mostly in the Centocelle quarter of Rome.

“And how do you feel with your classmates?”

“Good.”

“Good. And also with your gadjo classmates?”

“Yeah.”

“So, why don’t you then tell them anything about your life in the camp? Normally this happens when you are with friends. Is it really possible that you don’t talk about the camp and your Roma traditions?”

“No, they’ve never asked.”

“And how do you feel when you’re with them? How is your relationship? What do you do together?”

“We don’t talk that much. We say ‘Hello’, but I don’t have much confidence.”

“And in the break, don’t you laugh and play together?”

“Yeah, my classmates do so, but I stay on alone on my own. I only do this with my Romani schoolmates, with them sometimes in the break we go to the bathroom. I only see Roma classmates.”

“Why don’t you have any gadjo friends?”

“I don’t know, some are a bit interested, but the majority don’t even look at us.”

“And what do you like at school?”

“Nothing. I don’t like it there.”

“Nothing?”

“No, nothing.”

“And how would you change school? What would you like to do?”

“I’d change the teachers. They should be more kind, my classmates and the classrooms”

“How would you change the teachers?”

“Some of the teachers do not take any notice of the Roma. They don’t care. For example, when there is a test and they afterwards they read the grades in alphabetical order, they skip the Roma. They don’t even mention you and don’t tell you your grade.”

“Did you ever happen to have a support teacher, and get taken to other classes to make up?”

“No, it’s the agents from the associations that bring the children to school, that take the children in a different age group and take them to another class. They took me once, or maybe twice, because they say I don’t need it. The other children do some easier stuff, like 2+2. Even so, I feel I’m behind my classmates.”

“Why? Because you’re not being tracked?”

“Everyday I miss nearly three hours of school because of the transfer. I should leave school at 2 o’clock, but I already leave at midday.”

“And when do you arrive?”

“At eight, nine, ten. It depends. Sometimes earlier, sometimes later.”

Floriana was also transferred to this authorised camp from Casilino 900. She is 23 years old, has two sons and now lives in a caravan. In our interview she seemed unsatisfied about the school record of her older son, and the explanation she gave was that the teachers taught him differently and lacked any interest in teaching him properly.

“My son says everything’s alright at school, also with the teacher, but I don’t think he is studying well. He goes to school every day. It’s not that he goes one day and misses the other.”

“Your son is eight years old, right?”

“Yes, and I see that he is not good at school. I spoke to the teacher and she said he needs a support teacher. I said ok, but I haven’t seen any improvement yet. I think they get different treatment. If you take a look at his exercise book, you’ll notice the difference. And the teacher told me that he doesn’t want to learn. I told the teacher that she has to keep him with the Italian children, because the gypsy children always cling together. There are no other Roma in his class, because I wanted that, but the teacher keeps him away from the other children. But I think in three years of school, he should at least have learned to read and write, but he isn’t able to. He never takes homework. When I went to school I always

had homework to do...He was always moved up with the class, but he can't do anything. They don't call me if there's anything to discuss at school, and they have my number. And from this camp, they always arrive with a long delay, at 9 or 10 o'clock."

"And the laboratories? Does your son go?"

"Yes, he has to make up, so a teacher comes and brings him to another class, with some other five or six children. They are all Roma children, but of different ages during regular school time. Also the agents from the associations. I don't like them, they don't treat the children well, like animals, but they are not, even if they're gypsies. They never speak to us, I don't know what happens at school. They take them before lunch, so the City Council pays for the canteen, but my son never eats at school."

Another interviewee however, also living in this camp and transferred there from Casilino 900, perceives the situation of his children at schools in a different way. He is 24 years old, has four children and works as a cultural mediator for one association.

"My children are very well integrated, besides, since the schools are in the 7th Municipality the foreign children can integrate easily. They're always invited to the other children's parties. Sometimes they fight with other children, but it's normal. It has nothing to do with the fact that they are Roma. They feel good with their classmates, play together. When I took my little daughter to a party, all the parents said hello to me."

"Do you think there is different treatment for Roma and Gadjo children?"

"I can speak from my own experience as an agent who takes the children to school, and from what I have seen, the children are well integrated, they arrive, study, come back home, and this is very important for them. But it happens that the Roma children are mocked or insulted, like 'you're dirty', 'you sh*** Gypsy', 'you're a thief' and things like that. Then at home they tell their parents and then they come and want me to explain to them. So I sometimes had to go to school and fight with the teachers, and asked them why those kiddies were insulted. But nonetheless, I have always experienced equal treatment of Roma and Gadjo children. No differences. Twice a week we organise a laboratory for the Roma children who fall behind. We take them during regular schooling hours, so that they don't have to spend more time at school than the other children.

My little son draws very well, he says he wants to become a painter, but I say, let's wait, it's the first thing you've learned at school, let's wait."

Another father of two little girls was far more critical about the performance of his daughter at school and harshly accused the teachers of negligence and indifference towards the Roma children.

"See my daughter is 9 years old. Look at her exercise book, it's empty, she still can't write and read properly, she doesn't bring homework home. I don't understand, I send my daughter to school so that she'll learn something."

His nine-year-old daughter also spoke to us, and she explained that she liked Italian lessons very much and she felt sorry that she couldn't attend more lessons. She also spoke to us about the laboratories, where the children should be catching up, but where instead they seem to draw a lot and play.

"They often send me to an extra room, with other Roma children, many of my camp. There we draw a lot. I like History and Italian at school."

Conclusion

This paper has analysed discrimination in the education sector towards the Roma population living in so-called nomad camps in Rome, along with national policy responses and (anti-) racist activism.

Racism against Roma is present in today's European societies and it generates both measures intended for the benefit of Roma and numerous effects which have been criticised by various institutions as discriminatory. As the paper has shown, the racist discrimination the Roma face not only hinders them, but also, in complex ways, influences their efforts to achieve empowerment and emancipation. The situation of the "nomads" in Rome is characterised by overlapping discriminations in various key life spheres, such as employment and education, and it is aggravated and conditioned by the housing situation, i.e. the "nomad camp". The "nomad camp" is today in many ways emblematic for the management of the Roma in Italy. Intentionally designed as a means of preserving "gypsy culture", these camps evolved into mechanisms of tight control as soon as they were institutionalised. If initially the "nomad camp" resembled a slum of shacks and camper vans on a self-organised site, it has now evolved into a lager-camp. These lager-camps are surrounded by fences, monitored by video cameras, the entrance is controlled by a 24-hour private police force, and non-residents have to leave their ID at the entrance or even request an authorisation at the Fifth Department of Rome City Council. Eventually, the latter decided to let the Italian Red Cross manage the camps, which are now completely under state control.

This "Italian" way of treating, identifying and controlling the Roma in the "nomad camp" is gradually coming to resemble more and more the treatment applied to so-called illegal immigrants in the CIE – the Italian detention and expulsion centres. The modalities of managing this external "nomadism" is mirrored in the modalities for managing the internal "nomadism" associated with the Roma.

This is exemplified in the provision made by the Italian government and the City Council of Rome. These measures are all the more crucial to understanding the Roma "problem", since they mirror the "obsession" (Bravi, Sigona 2006) with civilisation, education and control of the Roma population.

The provisions enacted by the Italian government and Rome City Council reflect this transition, with the issue of the emergency decree (2008) and the "Nomad Plan" in Rome (2009). The emergency decree was issued after racist attacks on Roma in the Ponticelli district of Naples and due to the "highly critical situation" the "numerous presence of nomads" was causing. In this context, the prefects of Rome, Milan and Naples were named delegated commissioners to overcome the "Nomad emergency"

and were granted “extraordinary powers”, including identification measures, fingerprinting procedures (also for minors), the production of censuses, derogation from certain laws (such as the right to be informed in the event of administrative measures such as fingerprinting procedures), and taking decisions about the expulsion of individuals.

The “Nomad Plan” was established one year after the proclamation of the state of emergency and consisted mainly of dismantling so-called illegal settlements, such as the big Camp of Casilino 900 in 2010. The plan provided for measures such as the establishment of authorised camps only and the dismantling of all illegal ones. Contrary to the announcements by the City Council, no new camps have been built so far, but the displaced persons have been transferred to other existing “authorised camps” that are mainly overcrowded. These camps are characterised by 24-hour surveillance by private police services, surrounded by fences which checks on entrance and exit and the duty to identify oneself when entering. Furthermore, “socialisation services” are provided.

Our case study on the education situation for Roma in the authorised “nomad camps” – based on interviews with Roma, Roma associations, non-Roma anti-racist associations, activists and institutional representatives – has shown that the institutional responses are contradictory. The response from the Ministry of Public Education underlines the intention to move towards an “intercultural” and therefore “anti-racist” school. However, the MIUR can only provide a framework and recommendations to the regional Education Offices. In the end, each school has autonomy over its programme and agenda. The City Council plays an important role concerning the schooling of the Roma children, since the associations have to propose them their projects for the laboratories and school transfer. The associations have proved to be important actors in the schooling of Roma children as they organise laboratories in school for the Roma children. However, their role has also been analysed and emerges as contradictory as well, since the associations provide the transport to school and the laboratories, and depend to a certain extent on the City Council and the preservation camps. On the other hand, some associations have shown to be against the “nomad camps” and for decent housing solutions.

The City Council provides for the establishment of “authorised camps” in the remote periphery, which leads to difficulties over access to various public services, school and the workplace, and which segregates the Roma even more. As the case study has shown, the Roma children miss from two to three hours of school lessons each day due to the school transfer.

As far as schooling Roma children and an explicitly anti-racist education are concerned, the City Council of Rome has not demonstrated any progress towards inclusionary policy and anti-racist measures. The associations on the contrary try to establish anti-racist measures, in the sense of an education against prejudices, learning to know each other in common activities of Roma and non-Roma children. Explicit anti-racist education is equally missing so far.

The anti-racist activist scene tries to oppose the institutional measures, but has shown itself unable to fully disentangle itself, in its proposed solutions, from the fundamental categories underlying the imaginary of Roma “nomads” in Italy. Effective solutions are also hindered by internal differences between the various pro Roma and anti-racist groupings.

We have seen how the Roma are constructed as “deviant”, “criminal”, poorly educated, and reluctant to work or to integrate into mainstream society. This construction of the Roma constitutes another barrier to an inclusion into the class community at school and later to their access to the employment sector and reflects the conviction that their low level of integration is a result of their own shortcomings and failures. In our interviews, racism was firstly denied by many interviewees and/or described as an individual problem fuelled by a lack of tolerance towards ‘other cultures’ and due to great ignorance. “Blaming the marginalised” (Goldberg 1993) then emerged as a usual practice. This meant that the habits and culture of the “gypsies” could be highlighted as “problematic”, and hence provided explanations for their failed integration.

The institutions, the activists, and the mediation agents are, however, sensitive to Roma experience, but in our opinion, effective empowering and emancipatory projects are futile and soon reach their limits if racism is not acknowledged as a structural phenomenon that permeates society, as a kind of “cultural” setting for European societies that is far from being a problem of “wrong” attitudes and convictions.

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