

“Percorsi di integrazione? Il caso dei Rom in provincia di Pistoia”

Barbara Beneforti

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PATHS OF INTEGRATION? THE CASE OF ROMA IN THE PROVINCE OF PISTOIA

BY BARBARA BENEFORTI

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"ROMA" SIMPLY MEANS "MAN"

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Around the **5th century AD**, these groups began to migrate westward. The Roma penetrated into Afghanistan, then Iran and Persia

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In the second **half of the 14th century**, with the expansion of the Ottoman Turks, the Roma moved away from Greece, where they had lived for about three centuries, and dispersed in the Balkans.

They were usually defined according to the work they did: roma *kalderasa* (boilermakers), experts in metalworking; roma *lovara* (from Hungarian *ló*: horse) dedicated to the breeding and trade of horses; *ursari* (bear trainers), *masara* (fishermen) and so on.

Normally they prefer to be called simply **Roma**, which in Romani (their language, still used in various forms by the communities) simply means "man".



The *barò drom* (long journey) of the Italian Roma

At the end of the year 1300, the first Roma arrived on the central and southern coasts of Italy

The Roma were expelled from every territory in which they tried to settle and from the end of the **15th century, the prejudice against them became more and more widespread**

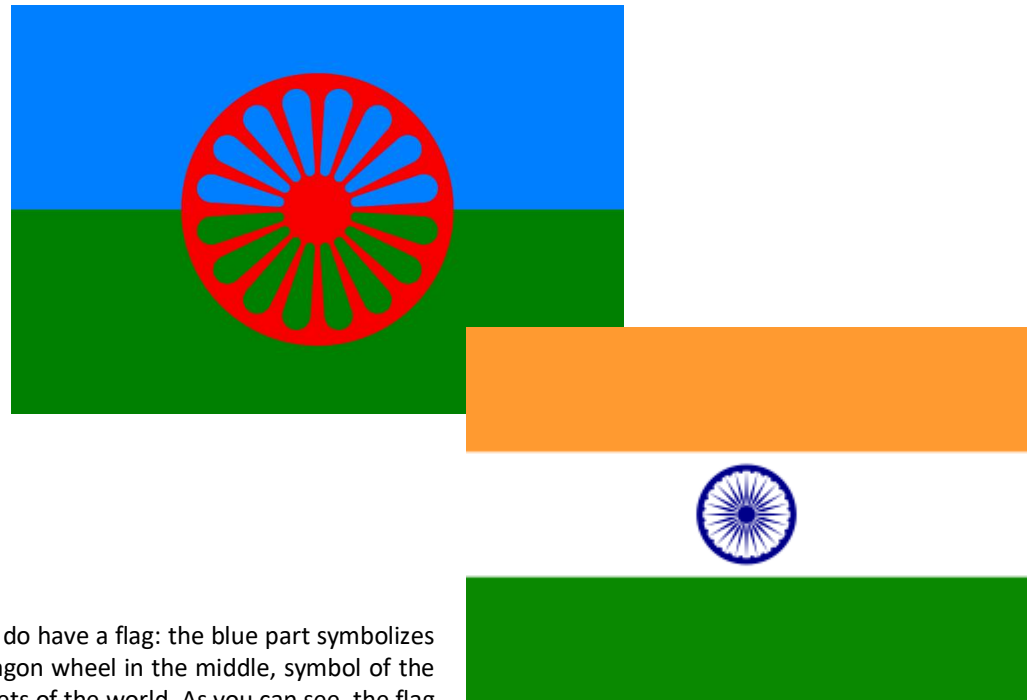
Things began to change only in the 18th century, when many enlightened sovereigns **began the assimilation of Roma people**, with the aim of making them citizens like everyone else.

Those who did not want or were not able for various reasons to integrate into the European populations continued for many years the practice of nomadism, but **from the second half of the 20th century, this practice has almost completely disappeared**. Today, the Roma who practice nomadism are a small minority.

In Italy, the Roma minority has **never obtained legislative recognition at the national level**. There are, however, many regional laws, which speak of "gypsy and nomadic populations", "nomads", "traditionally nomadic and semi-nomadic populations", "Roma and Sinti", "Roma, Sinti and Travellers". From these definitions, **the equation nomads/Roma is evident**, and even in what we can call 'general feeling' the two categories coincide, **even if the practice of nomadism is now residual**.

However, **the Roma remain one of the most discriminated categories and object of racism**, this is the reason why we are particularly interested in the topic, where we must examine the mechanisms of the spread of social exclusion and the tools to counter it.

The Roma people do not have a State, but they do have a flag: the blue part symbolizes the sky and the green part the earth, with a wagon wheel in the middle, symbol of the journey, the *barò drom* of the Roma on the streets of the world. As you can see, the flag is very similar to the Indian flag, the land of origin of the Roma, even though there instead of the wheel there is the Ashoka wheel.



Historical memory to build spaces for inclusion in the present

The word *Porrajmos* means "great devouring" and refers to the carnage carried out by the Nazis against the Roma during the Holocaust..

The number of Roma killed during the Holocaust: **it is estimated that between 200,000 and 500,000 Roma were killed during the Porrajmos** (there were around one million Roma in Europe before the war).

Studying the events and the extent of the Porrajmos is useful to understand how even today not enough has been done to acknowledge **the centenarian history of discrimination and violence** to which the Roma have been subjected.

the concentration camps used from September 11, 1940: Boiano, in the province of Campobasso; Agnone, in the province of Isernia; Prignano sulla Secchia, in the province of Modena; Berra, in the province of Ferrara, and others.

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This is the "stone memorial" located in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp (East Germany). Each pillar represents a concentration camp where Roma, Sinti and Travellers were exterminated during the Porrajmos (the image dates back to a visit in 2010).

Italy: small numbers, much anxiety

the demographic presence of people who call themselves Roma or Sinti is extremely small: no more than 200,000 people according to the highest estimates, for a percentage of 0.2% of the total population. About 60% of these have Italian citizenship.

In Pistoia there are just over 200 persons who define themselves as Roma or Sinti (0.009% of the provincial population).

The heaviest discrimination is evident in the following areas

- access to housing (many Roma still live in 'camps')
- access to work
- access to education
- access to health care
- for Roma foreign citizens: recognition of a certain legal status and obtaining residence permits and citizenship.



Roma camp "Brusigliano" - Pistoia (photo by Valentina Bravetti)

The ECRI (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance) of the Council of Europe condemned the housing discrimination of Roma and Sinti in Italy, they stressed out that housing policies cannot follow an emergency logic, perpetuating the mechanism of 'camps', but must be accompanied by interventions aimed at the regularization of legal positions, labor inclusion, social and cultural promotion and active participation of Roma people.

In many areas of Europe, the living conditions of Roma are precarious. The video that we will see, taken from the institutional website of the Council of Europe-Dosta Campaign against prejudice against the Roma, summarizes it in broad terms:

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Italian strategy for the inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Travellers

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Four axes of intervention were identified, which gave rise to as many tables and working groups: **housing, health, education and work.**

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The objective was to overcome the emergency phase and obtain important results in terms of social inclusion of Roma populations in the period 2012-2020.



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THE LEGAL STATUS OF ROMA IN ITALY

At least four problematic aspects stand out:

- **EU Roma** (in particular Romanian Roma): *Difficulty in proving stable work/income in order to obtain residence in Italy.*
- **non-EU Roma**: *Impossibility to obtain residence permits for family reasons when we are in the presence of marriages made with Roma rite, not recognized by the institutions of the State.*
- **de facto stateless Roma** (in particular former Yugoslav citizens): *difficulties due to the very complicated procedures for the recognition of stateless status.*
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The regulatory environment that intersect these aspects are many:

- **the rules on citizenship** (in particular the DLgs. 91/1992)
- the provisions relating to the right of EU citizens to move and reside freely in the territory of member states (in particular DLgs. 30/2007 and s.m.)
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- **the procedures for the recognition of stateless status, the procedures for defining legal status** (which cannot disregard the activation of relations of collaboration with the consular authorities of the States of origin or of origin of the parents).



The issue of legal status amplifies all **the problems of social inclusion** already endemic in Roma communities, even in households with Italian citizenship, and puts them at even greater risk of discrimination and obstacles in the entitlement of citizenship rights.

The **uncertain legal status**, the **precarious housing situation**, the **difficulties in entering the labor market** and the **high risk of social marginalization** lead to the exclusion of minors from school and educational paths and increase the **risk of deviance**, such as the risk of committing crimes or living by their wits.



Roma camp "Brusigliano" – Pistoia

Solving problems related to legal status can start virtuous paths and improve living conditions



Nena was born in Yugoslavia (in Nikšić) in 1966.

She arrived in Pistoia (Italy) in 1974, she was never registered in the registers of Yugoslavian citizens, and therefore she never had the Yugoslavian citizenship.

Since 1974, she lives in the 'camp' of Brusigliano (Pistoia). There she got married with the Roma rite, she had three children and she lived by her wits, assistance, and collecting iron together with her husband and her extended family.

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In these days, she is preparing the necessary documentation to apply for Italian citizenship.

What can Italy do?

PARTICIPATION: It is necessary that the Roma themselves actively participate and contribute to the policies that concern them.

TERRITORIAL NETWORK: It is necessary to intervene in the territories, working in a network between the various institutional actors in order to achieve in practice the objectives of the National Strategy.

RESOURCES: Adequate funding and unambiguous policies are needed; there is no other solution than that in which politics takes charge and promotes the necessary interventions.

COMMUNICATION: The mass media must be intervened to avoid false and misleading equations, such as Roma = launderer, Roma = beggar, Roma = dirt, Roma = nomad and to avoid the word "gypsy / zingaro".

NORMATIVE CHANGES: Italy must recognize the status of Roma as a linguistic minority, including Romanization in the provisions of Law 482 of 1999 on historical linguistic minorities.

IMPLEMENTATION OF RIGHTS: Finally, it is necessary to respond concretely and not only on paper to the many recommendations of the Council of Europe addressed to Italy in order to reduce discrimination against the Roma population, in particular for the right to work, housing and education.





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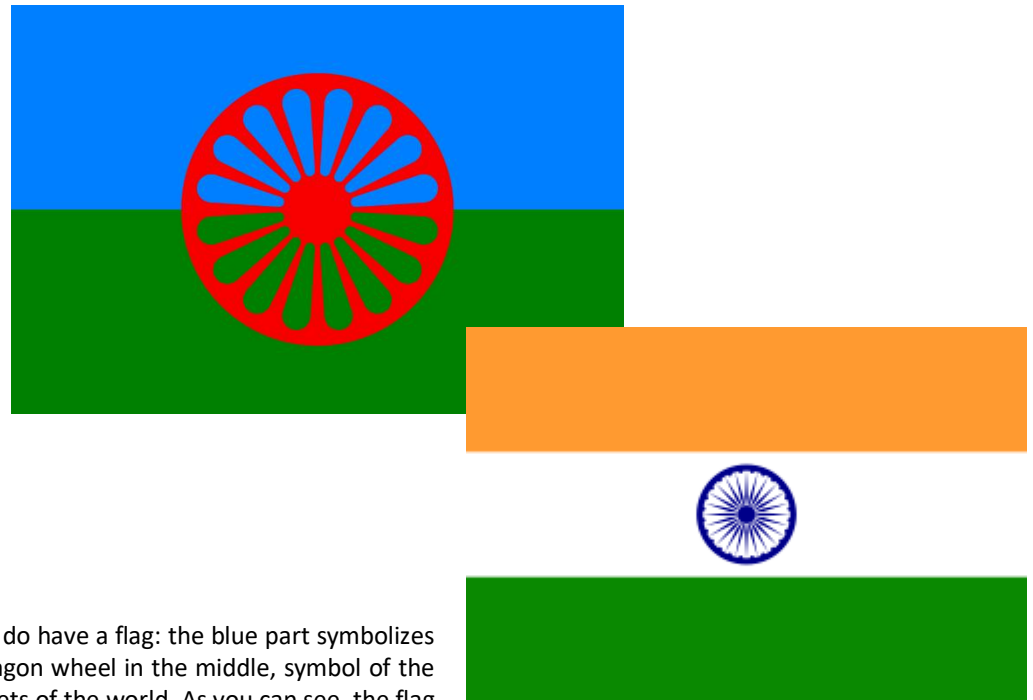
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