

A Dialogue: the Roma and the Italian Government

Kathryn Thomas
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Adviser, MaryAnn Cunningham

Abstract

The Roma have lived in Italy for hundreds of years, yet they have yet to be accepted as members of Italian society. In this paper, I explore the intricate relationships between territory and citizenship, and citizenship and resistance in order to understand the issues that the Roma face daily in Italy. Because the Roma challenge Italian norms of territoriality and belonging in society, the Italian state must squash their resistance to societal norms to maintain power. I use the theories of territoriality, identity creation, and spaces of resistance to understand this power dynamic. In times of discontent and war, European societies often turn to the discrimination of minority groups to unite society. This oppression is occurring to the Roma in Italy today. The Italian state has resorted to the only outlet open to it: violent suppression.



Figure 1: Roma man begging in front of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Italy.



Figure 2: A Roma family performing and begging on a subway car.

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Chapter 1

Who are the Roma?



Figure 3: Violetta stands second from the left; Cristina is next to her in the black dress.

On July 7, 2008, thirteen-year-old Cristina and eleven-year-old Violetta Djeordsevic walked home from selling baubles to tourists. They playfully dared one another to jump into the Black Sea. It had been a long day in the hot sun and both girls were eager to cool off in the cool water.

Violetta jumped first. The waves pulled her under. Frantic, Cristina jumped into the water to rescue her younger sister. Both girls drowned. A passer-by who had seen the girls' jump waded in to recover the bodies. He also called the police.

What happened next outraged the Roma¹ community and the world. The girls' bodies were covered with beach towels and lay where they had been dragged on the beach. The beachgoers around them continued to enjoy their day in the sun. Three hours later, an ambulance arrived, while a couple "nonchalantly ate a picnic while looking on at the scene... another threw a Frisbee nearby" (McDougall 2008).

¹ The terms Rom, Roma, and Romani are interchangeable. I will use Roma for the sake of consistency.

This incident provoked harsh criticism of the Italian government's tolerance of racism directed toward the Roma. Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, a Catholic official in Naples, issued a statement decrying the treatment of the Roma by Italian citizens, stating that Cristina and Violetta had “faced nothing but prejudice in life and indifference in death” (*ibid*).



Figure 4: The girls' bodies near some of the picnickers.

This criticism could not have come at a worse time for the Italian government. The government, specifically Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, was still trying to defend a recent fingerprinting program aimed at Roma living in Italy. This program, enacted in May 2008, was issued in tandem with a “security” package that included making illegal immigration a jailable offence and making it punishable with up to three years to use minors to beg for money – a measure which appeared to be aimed directly at Roma people (Melander 2008). Berlusconi won his position for a third time by running on a thinly veiled anti-immigration ticket. Riding the right-wing hysteria against immigration,

he pinpointed Roma settlements as dens of criminality and locations in need of reform (McDougall 2008).

As early as 2007, news agencies were noticing a rise in discrimination against Roma as well as other immigrants (Cappelli 2007). This xenophobia seems to be a result of a “crime wave” involving Romanian immigrants in early 2007 (*ibid.*). Several crimes were attributed to Romanian gypsies within a few months. The “crime wave” peaked when a Romani man was accused of killing a navy officer’s wife. The man admitted to robbing the woman, but denied striking her in any way (*ibid.*). A few nights later, Italian President Giorgio Napolitano signed an emergency decree allowing for the expulsion of “potentially dangerous EU citizens” (*ibid.*).

One police chief claimed that the authorities had been instructed to compile a list of potentially dangerous people that may qualify for expulsion prior to the emergency decree. They were ordered to do so with “absolute respect for human dignity, avoiding a witch-hunt and without criminalizing ethnic groups” (*ibid.*). As a result of the decree, local police authorities bulldozed a shantytown on the outskirts of Rome in which mostly Roma families lived. Since 2007, the xenophobia has been reinforced by the Italian government’s stance toward immigration. The government has been criticized by numerous human rights organizations as well as the Council of Europe for its tolerance of hate-crimes in Italy. The Commissioner for Human Rights for the Council of Europe said that he had “serious concerns about discrimination and xenophobia in Italy” and that “there is a persistent climate of intolerance against them and their living conditions are ... unacceptable...” (lifeinitaly.com 2009).

The right wing has gained increasing power as Berlusconi used his first two terms (and the beginning of his third) as Prime Minister to push through political programs that promote anti-immigration sentiment. It is rumored that his administration has published propaganda against immigration as well, though no solid evidence has yet arisen (ENAR 2007). The Roma are easy scapegoats for this crusade against immigrants mainly because of their lack of assimilation. This refusal to assimilate has been evident since their arrival in Europe 600 years ago. Now, like then, their settlements are bright, colorful, and distinctive from the surrounding countryside or cityscape, so they are easy to locate (McDougall 2008).

Gypsies appeared in Europe from India in the fifteenth century. At this time, they were known by many names: Zigeuner, Romani, Bohemian, Manouch, and Jenisch to name a few. They were given these names by the French, English, etc., as a way to describe them. The gypsies themselves, however, never wavered from calling themselves Rom and describing their language as Romani (though there were, and continue to be, many dialects of Romani). I refer to Gypsies as Roma, given that it is their preference. Hubert (1999) says that "anyone who is conscious of being a Gypsy is one." Though they were historically a wandering culture, ninety-five percent of Gypsies are now more or less settled.

Roma communities are segregated both by others and by their own choice. They are distrustful of outsiders and outsiders distrustful of them. Historically, this has proven to be the only safe way of life (see Chapter 4). Pride in their culture keeps many Roma communities from assimilating into the broader community. There is not one uniform Roma culture. However, Roma peoples, share many cultural traits that make them easy

to identify as such. These traits include their manner of dress, their accent (many speak different dialects of Romani or different languages all together, but the Roma tend to share linguistic traits), and music (ERRC 2007). For the purposes of this paper, their similarities far outweigh the differences between branches.

Over the years, the Roma have learned to distrust the process of assimilation. The Italian government's policy toward immigrants tends toward the ideal that the sooner an immigrant is assimilated, the better it is for the country (EERC 2007). Thus, the disagreement between the proud Roma people and the prejudiced state is not difficult to understand.

In this paper, I explore the intricate relationships between territory and citizenship, and citizenship and resistance in order to understand the issues that the Roma face daily in Italy. It is important to reiterate that this paper will look at the affect of government actions on the Roma as a whole. Roma society is defined by those traits that underlie all Roma communities and this paper will refer to the Roma as sharing one large group rather than breaking each group down individually.

This paper will refer to several theories to try to make sense of the Roma's wandering history that has recently been curtailed by states. By understanding this curtailment, the form of resistance in which the Roma participate will be made clearer. The idea of territoriality is essential to understanding the Roma and their place in society. Territoriality is a human strategy used to affect, influence or control resources, and people by controlling area. It is used to establish different degrees of access to people, things, and relationships within and without of the delineated territory (Sack 1986: 1-4). According to Sack, there are three main facets of territoriality: classification by area,

communication of the boundary, and enforcement or control over access to the area or things within one's territory (Sack 1986: 21-22).

People Who Have Tried to Keep Track of the Roma

The Roma were widely researched by academics at the end of World War II. Prior to WWII, many countries forced Roma communities to register in local police registers upon arriving in a new town or city. This made it extremely easy for authorities to round up and intern the Roma from 1940 to 1946. The Nazis interned Gypsies as a precursor to the concentration camps. Gypsies were not included in the general prison population in these camps; they were in a separate camp-within-the-camp. In August 1944, an order was given to terminate all Gypsies. Between 250,000 and 300,000 of them died.

After WWII, Gypsies were a topic of interest to academics; many books were written on Gypsies between 1950 and 1970. Most of these were written without a clear understanding of "gypsy culture." Researchers did studies of the history of the Roma without interacting with them. Research about the Roma slowly changed to more field-based study in the 1970s. There is a slow decline in the term "gypsy" as more researchers took the care to refer to the Roma as such (Crowe 1994: 20-30).

Most publications concerned with the Roma in recent years have been newspapers and reports published by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Newspapers such as the Turkish Daily News and New York Times have sensationalized stories related to the Roma (David 2008). They latched onto the horrible story of Cristina and Violetta, for example. Newspapers have framed the relationship between the Roma and the Italian

state as a one-sided power struggle with the state eliminating as many Roma as possible within its borders.

NGOs publish reports about human rights abuses around the world. The Roma have been on their radar for about a decade. It is uncertain what shifted attention toward this particular group, but the attention has only been growing in intensity over the past ten years. NGO publications tend to portray the Italian state as a fascist regime set on exterminating the Roma (ERRC 2008a).

One of the largest NGOs concerned exclusively with Roma rights is the EU Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC). It is made up of Amnesty International, European Roma Rights Centre, European Roma Information Office, European Network against Racism, the Open Society Institute, Spolu International Foundation, Minority Rights Group International, the European Roma Grassroots Organization, and the Roma Education Fund and the Fundacion Secretariado Gitano. Its sole purpose is to help solve the individual/structural discrimination, poverty and social exclusion that Roma communities face in the European Union. These NGOs meet on a regular basis under the umbrella organization ERPC to address the Roma issue. The publications put out by this organization (ERPC) and each of the individual organizations focus mainly on poverty and illiteracy. The structural problems causing the poverty are not addressed.

Published pieces about the Roma appeal to peoples' emotional and empathetic sensibilities. They recount human-interest stories of small children selling handmade trinkets. However, these stories do not address the underlying problems. Many recent publications about the Roma detail their "culture," but they do not place the Roma into any broader context (such as their historical or social context). The Roma's lack of

permanent territory within any state and lack of citizenship, which are intimately linked, negatively affect their relationship with the state. By refusing to buy into the “property = citizenship” paradigm, the Roma are challenging the state, whether they mean to or not. For the state to remain in power, it must insist on this paradigm and make every citizen a “good” citizen (i.e. located at an address, possibly owning or renting property, participating in Italian society) (Sack 1986: 1-5). Because the state cannot easily trace a Roma citizen to a specific address and since many are constantly on the move (even just between different settlements), they are viewed as a problem that must be solved. The Italian government has chosen to solve this problem by making pariahs out of all Roma people.

My approach is generalizable to other landless people. Examining the Roma within a geographically analytical framework of citizenship and territoriality makes this generalization possible. The theories that I will use to analyze the Roma will be helpful in the study of other nomadic peoples such as the Travelers in northern Europe or the Pavee in Ireland and the United States. In addition, these theories can be applied to Roma in other parts of Europe. The theories used in this paper are helpful in understanding an individual’s relationship to their state. They can be applied to situations much larger than individual nomadic groups as well. The powers exerted over one and those that one exerts on others simply through the maintenance of borders and territory are important to understand through Sack’s theory of territoriality.

Methods and Positionality

I employ a review of official and non-official sources for this paper. Official sources are published by governments (Cloke et al 2004:42). I utilized textual, graphic, and numerical government publications. I chose to include several pictures in this paper. These pictures were published in the online journal, *The Guardian* (See the Appendix). The slideshow accompanied an article detailing the horror felt around the world at the death of Cristina and Violetta. They were meant to represent the everyday life of Roma families in Italy. While I selected just a few of the photos, there were many other of families in shacks or begging on the street. I had a difficult decision when deciding whether to include these in my paper or not because they clearly portray a specific view of the Roma in Italy. I chose these pictures because I believe they portray the view of the Roma evident in the public discourse about Roma roles in Italian society.

I chose to include both pictures of Violetta and Cristina because these are the images that appeared in Europe right after their deaths. These photos clearly have an agenda. The first (Figure 3), of the girls with their friends, give the impression that these girls were just normal Roma/Italian young girls; they had fun, they hung-out with their friends, and they played it up for the camera. The second photo (Figure 4) of the girls' bodies on the beach also has an agenda. It seeks to shock, and it succeeds. When one sees the two young girls lying next to two picnickers, one cannot help but be incensed.

However, when Europeans see pictures of an old man begging in front of a national monument (Figure 1), they are incensed for a different reason. They see a public nuisance rather than a poor man that no one is helping. The rest of the pictures (Figures 2, 5, 6, and 7) inevitably present the Roma as poor, given the enormous rates of poverty

among the population (ENAR 2007). The pictures legitimate some of the feelings of xenophobia and anti-beggar sentiment in Italy. The Roma are very visible in Italy – begging, playing for money, selling cheap homemade items on trains or near tourist attractions. While many people have sympathy for minority peoples, or the poor, they get tired of being constantly confronted with images of impoverishment. To some extent, the discomfort caused by beggars is understandable. I chose to include these pictures of Roma beggars in public places to remind the reader of the situation Italians encounter everyday.

Non-official sources are those published by individuals or groups that lay outside the “official realm of the state” (*ibid*: 62). The Italian government and EU Commission on Human Rights published the official sources I employ in this paper such as Conference Reports, Resolutions, and laws passed in Parliament.

A problem with using official sources to study the Roma is that the Roma do not “officially” exist – thus the push to document them. Without an accurate registration, it is impossible to know how many Roma currently live in Italy. The census reports that there are anywhere from 55,000 to 200,000 Roma in Italy (Amnesty International 2008). Both the government and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) use citizenship applications and census counts to approximate these population numbers.

NGO publications supply many statistics and facts about day-to-day life of Roma communities. Reports (UN Committee on the Elimination on All Forms of Racial Discrimination: Concluding Observations on Italy; European Network Against Racism: Shadow Report; Human Rights Council: “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related;” United

States Department of State: “2008 Human Rights Report: Italy”) have been issued about quality of life, literacy, life expectancy, occupation, and child mortality rates, to name some of the larger issues. These are useful to get a relatively unbiased view of the situation, especially when looking at international NGOs rather than those specifically focused on the Roma. Roma-focused NGOs publish reports that have an obvious bias, so these sources must be used with caution (EERC 2007). However, these websites (errc.org, European Roma Rights Council is one good example) have postings of legal actions taken on the behalf of Roma people (individuals or as a community), as well as events, and public speeches, which are not easily accessed anywhere else.

In undertaking this research, I have had to examine my reasons behind this particular subject of study. I am a young middle-class white woman who attends a liberal arts college in the United States. My awareness of the issues surrounding the Roma came from accounts by two Romanian friends who have witnessed the racism directed toward the Roma throughout their lives.

I began this project looking at the Roma in Romania. However, my first day of research coincided with the first ever Roma Summit hosted by the EU to promote a dialogue about the issue of racism and oppression faced by the Roma in countries throughout the European Union. Roma representatives tried to direct the conversation toward the Roma in Italy because of the recent security package passed which requires the Roma to submit to fingerprinting, allows for the deportation of illegal immigrants, and criminalizes the use of children for begging which seems to be aimed directly at the Roma population in Italy (ERRC 2008b). This led me to shift the focus of my research to Italy.

Throughout my research, I acknowledge my lack of personal experience with these issues may lead to biased results. Because I cannot speak Italian, my research focuses on information produced in the English language that will color my results. Despite this, I believe that I present the issues surrounding the Roma in Italy through a geographical framework that sheds light on their problems and on broader structural issues. The media coverage on the Roma in Italy has presented the issue largely as one of racism. I attempted to incorporate government and NGO publications to broaden my knowledge base about the Roma in Italy. By including these sources, the structural and societal issues underlying discrimination against the Roma in Italy become cogent.

In Chapter Two I will address how the issues surrounding the Roma can be related to issues elsewhere in the world. It will discuss the Roma in relation to marginalized groups, both those with permanent addresses and those without.

Chapter Three will analyze several theories that will shed light on the current situation of the Roma in Italy.

Chapter Four will explore the situation of the Roma in Italy today. While “official” statistics are scarce, descriptive analyses are numerous. This chapter will use reports from Amnesty International, the European Roma Rights Centre, and the Human Rights Council to paint a picture of what it is like to be Roma in Italy in the twentieth century.

Chapter Five will provide a necessarily brief history of the Roma from the fourteenth century through the early 1900s. This chapter gives the reader an historical context for the resistance demonstrated by the Roma today.

The issues that the Roma face in Italy are interesting on a number of levels. On a local level, the Roma have been struggling with discrimination their entire existence. Lately, the Italian government is capitalized on xenophobia created by a few “lawless gypsies” (as they were painted in the press) to impose strict regulations on Roma living in Italy. On an international scale, the issue of the Roma is similar to the situation many minorities face in other countries. By understanding what has happened in Italy, it is possible that the position of other minorities may be clearer and we can begin to take steps toward a more peaceful existence.

Chapter 2

Putting the Roma in Context

People rarely ponder control structures in their everyday lives. They tend to take for granted that the government will supply them with clean water, good roads, and reliable police and fire forces. Citizens abide the laws of their countries because they understand the arrangement: we abide the law (most of the time) and the law keeps us safe. What happens if someone decides these laws are no longer acceptable? Or the boundaries in which we must reside must change? This is a question few of us ponder on a daily basis. The Roma, though, have to deal with these questions every day.

The channels through which opposition to one's country must travel before action is taken are specific and complicated. Laws must be challenged in court or in Parliament or Congress. Often only those with money or power are able to see these protests through to their end, whatever that may be. Often, those protesting must have some viable stake in the country in which they are protesting.

The Roma run into many problems when contemplating how to protest their treatment within Italy. Many are not citizens, so appealing to the government often goes unnoticed (Bhopal et. al 2008: 170). NGOs appeal on their behalf, but as discussed in Chapter 4, such appeals rarely result in action. Moreover, such protests have occurred too late for hundreds of Roma people hurt or killed by anti-Roma violence.

Given the situation, the Roma have a few choices in terms of means of protest. First, they could leave to try and find a more accepting society. Many European societies are as discriminatory as Italy, though, and moving requires resources. Since the

government has forcefully relocated Roma families to encampments made of solitary dwellings, they can no longer pick up and move like they could have historically. This option seems to pose more problems than solutions.

Second, the Roma can fight back. However, as discussed above, fighting back is problematic as well. Without proper documentation, demonstrators can be jailed and deported for protesting their treatment as Roma living in Italy. The Italian police seem to have free reign when it comes to deconstructing Roma settlements, so protests could result in the loss of one's home as well as other's homes (Egenberger 2007). One example is the security pact signed by many local police forces in large cities which enabled them to "repress unauthorized and authorized Roma camps" (ENAR 2007). The Italian government has effectively cut off any means of protest for Roma people living within their border which works well for them. They are then able to enact policies that discriminate against this minority group without having to face serious recourse. The EU is reluctant to censure governments for enacting seemingly fair legislation, so Italy has continued to forcibly relocate families and fingerprint undocumented Roma against their will (David 2008; ERRC 2008c).

Other minority groups are in similar situations around the globe. The Pavee in Ireland face similar discrimination (Bhopal et al. 2008). The Travelers around Europe are treated as "nomads" like the Roma and the same laws set out to punish the Roma (those prohibiting illegal immigration and mandatory fingerprinting) affect them. Italy has passed the most stringent laws that have been decried in papers globally, but other countries in Europe have passed similar legislation. The situation of the Roma in Italy can be likened to that of Roma in France, Britain, and Germany as well.

By analyzing resistance and place theories, what seems like a lack of resistance on the part of Italy's Roma population is seen as active resistance. Obviously vocal resistance happens in town hall meetings, at protests, and on the streets, but the type of resistance in which the Roma participate is not so vocal or organized. Rather, the Roma resist the state simply by *being*. They refuse to submit to the dominating power, i.e. the state, which continues to attempt to force them into government housing, inadequate government schools specifically designed to segregate Roma children, and government-made jobs that are underpaid and menial labor. For centuries the governments of Europe have attempted to integrate, assimilate, or evacuate the Roma in their populations and it has yet to make a dent (with the notable exception of the Nazis during WWII). The Roma have persevered in countries that do not want them, that blame them for all of their crime and lash out at them during times of economic crisis, and that tend to treat them all like criminals.

Chapter 3

Theories on Spaces of Resistance, Representation, and Territoriality as They Pertain to the Roma

Who are you? This is a difficult question complicated by both internal and external factors. When asked, I could define myself first as a Christian, a woman, or a mid-westerner. My answer would depend on the context of the question: who is asking, where we are, and to what the question was referring. My answer could even change depending on my mood. If asked, I could not tell you how others view me. Others' definitions of me would also depend on context. I may be described as funny, Caucasian, or a good worker, depending on who was asking and who was answering the question. The creation of one's identity is not concrete; it depends on the person (or group of people), the situation, and the way in which the question is phrased. There are a number of explanations for how these different identities are produced and maintained. In this chapter, I examine some theories helpful in explaining the shaping of Roma identity.

The construction of a group identity defines the ways in which it is able to interact within society. During the era of slavery, people with black skin became subservient, seen as objects, and slaves. They were unable to resist the practice of slavery because of their socially constructed status. Instead, those whom society privileged – white men (and women to a lesser extent) – had to fight for them. Similarly, the Roma in Italy have had their identity created by others. While they might describe themselves as Roma, a man or woman, a craft worker, a metal smith, etc., Italian society defines them as a group of outsiders, troublemakers, and lawless criminals (Marklein 2005). This negative definition of the Roma affects the ways in which they are able to resist government

“security” measures aimed at documenting illegal immigrants (specifically the Roma who are undocumented). Despite the fact that the Roma have been present in Italy since before WWII, Italians have not yet accepted them as part of their society.

Defining the Roma as outsiders has affected their status in society. They are unable to register for elections, receive much of the government assistance available, and they have difficulties sending their children to public school because of their lack of proper documents. Obviously, the construction of the Roma as outsiders affects every aspect of their lives. This paper will focus on the intimate connection between the construction of one’s identity and one’s ability to resist oppression or domination, using the Roma as a reference.

Representation of nomadic peoples is a widely studied subject. Two studies I use to inform this project are those of Bhopal et al. (2008) and Cresswell (1997). Bhopal et al. come at the issue through the lens of multicultural societies, specifically Britain (Bhopal et al. 2008: 175). Cresswell takes an historical approach – examining how the nomad has been represented throughout the years (Cresswell 1997: 360). To understand these chapters, I found it helpful to first cover Sack’s theory of territorialism (Sack 1986: 3). His theory sheds light on both of their discussions.

Territoriality is a human strategy used to affect, influence or control resources and people by controlling area. It is used to establish different degrees of access to people, things, and relationships within and without of the delineated territory (Sack 1986: 1-4). There are three main facets of territoriality. First, there must be classification by area. Second, there must be communication of the boundary. This communication can be through signs or other markers, through walls, or through a motion such as pointing to

delineate a boundary. Last, territoriality must include enforcement or control over access to the area or things within one's territory (Sack 1986: 21-22). Sack states that these facets of territoriality can be found in all societies and that it is a key geographic component in understanding how society and space are interconnected (*ibid*: 4). Sack's theory is a good supplement to Staeheli and Pile's discussions of places of resistance as well. Staeheli discusses the spaces and scales of resistance in *Political Geography*. She argues that attempts by minority groups to resist occur mostly in places where the exertion of power is weak (Staeheli 1994: 389). Pile focuses on the reasons behind resistance and the places in which it is allowed to happen by the structures of power (Pile 1997: 14).

These readings, together, help flesh out a theoretical framework within which the situation of the Roma in Italy can be understood.

Society and space are interconnected, which is obvious when looking at the interactions between the state and space. The state polices its borders with signs, walls, ditches, and police officers. They are constantly keeping track of personal property, as well, through taxation, registration, building permits, etc. Maintaining territory requires constant effort by those in power (Sack 1986: 19). Pile also focuses on power relations.

Pile defines geographies of resistance as the spaces in which acts of resistance occur (Pile 1997: 3). Authority creates these spaces – authority creates and tries to police all space within its territory. According to Pile, resistance is a result of the different power relations. It is the way that people or groups of people attempt to subvert, live with, or change these power relations (*ibid*: 6).

For Pile, resistance is less about individual acts than about the need to find a *place* in a power-geography dynamic where space is denied (Pile 1997: 15). By finding a place, a movement is able to solidify their legitimacy to those involved. A place enables a group to organize and create a base of operations, so to speak. The implication of this search for a place may be that resistance occurs outside of the domination of the structures of power. However, Pile also states that resistance can only take place on terms defined by the structures of power (*ibid*: 20). Thus, the state cannot possibly control all of its area at once, so there are certain spaces in which resistance *can* take place.

These weak areas are the focus of Staeheli's work. She states that "through struggle, the power relations of society are inscribed in landscape" (Staeheli 1994: 389). The material manifestations of power relations work to support the ideologies of the structures of power and determine the ability of groups to find a place on this landscape where they can mount resistance. The places where resistance *is* able to arise are the marginal spaces of a territory. The spaces where dominant power relations are weakest, ambiguous, or where the nature of the space is malleable (it can be redefined or restructured), are the places where resistance flourishes (*ibid*: 389). It is within these spaces that the reach of those in power is incomplete – these are the places on the margins of society (*ibid*: 390).

People who live within the margins of society are seen in a negative light. They are our poor, our homeless, and our nomads (*ibid*. 391). Those that live on the margins have their identities defined for them by society. They are too flighty to settle down, too stupid to earn enough money to afford a home, etc, etc. Those in power dictate how

nomads are viewed in Italian society. Bhopal et al. claim that in multicultural societies (such as England) and spaces (such as schools and civil service), the Roma *should* be able to easily negotiate through society. Multicultural spaces have anti-racism legislation in place. In these places, governments claim that anti-racism legislation is strictly imposed; these areas are normally thoroughly policed, as well (Bhopal et al. 2008: 180).

In multicultural societies, cultural differences are dramatic. Most western democracies are becoming more diverse, and so these differences are becoming more dramatic and more visible. Bhopal et al. cite Taylor's identification of two irreconcilable but interconnected "politics of recognition" in diverse Western democracies (Bhopal et al. 2008: 185). The first is the politics of dignity in which people claim to be blind to difference between cultures. This behavior oppresses different identities. The second is the politics of difference, which seeks to recognize difference. While the politics of difference also has negative repercussions, Bhopal et al. see it as the better of the two behaviors.

Rather than producing positive change, the politics of difference have caused fissures in Italian society between "real" Italians and all others. The differences between "real" Italians and Roma culture are blatant. Their religions differ, their clothing differs, and their lifestyles differ. Perhaps most important, though, is the difference in self-identification and identity creation. While most "real" Italians are able to present themselves for what they believe they are – Italian, immigrant, worker, executive, etc. – the Roma are given an identity with which they may or may not agree. They are forced to focus on their differences (at least in part) because Italian society as a whole refuses to let them forget how they are different. Italians may encounter similar relations when they

travel in the EU or elsewhere. In effect, the politics of difference effects any everyone depending on their situation and on who controls identity in different situations.

Cresswell argues, through historical analysis, how Gypsies have been defined as a geographic metaphor for postmodernism. The valorization of travel in literature and personal accounts throughout history has indicated the privileged positions of those writing the account. From the heroic male travelers to modern middle-class adventurer-travelers, to the upper-middle class Victorian women who toured the world, travel has been a rare privilege to those who can afford it. However, Gypsies (who are often grouped with travelers and wanderers) are poor and uneducated. They subvert the norm. Power, in light of these readings, is about territoriality – strict boundaries – and the nomadic lifestyle of the Roma subverts this power.

Thus, Cresswell claims that the Roma lifestyle is a critique of the spatialization of domination and because of this, the Roma are a good metaphor for postmodern thought (which seeks to subvert societal norms) (Cresswell 1997: 361). Cresswell uses De Certeau's theories from *The Practice of Everyday Life* to take this comparison to a deeper level. Instead of only valorizing the movement of nomads, De Certeau's work paints the everyday acts of normal people as resisters. Pedestrians in the city are "heroic" resisters moving against the disciplining machinations of the city which are the strict traffic rules, the city planner's pedestrian flow charts, etc. (Cresswell 1997: 368). Because pedestrians are able to move on or off the sidewalk, at the corner or in the middle of a block, walking forward or backward, the state is unable to control their movements as they are able to those who ride the bus, train, tram, or drive their cars. Both types of movement (those within society and those functioning on society's margins) help to substantiate that

movement agitates against the spatial order enforced by those in power. This movement and resistance prove that it is impossible to have total discipline within one's territory.

If it is impossible to totally control one's territory, then Staeheli's places of resistance surely can be found. She posits that places of resistance arise in areas that are on the margins of society, or in places where those in power are absent. Because even a simple pedestrian movement can function as resistance, it seems that even the tiniest spaces (such as sidewalks) can produce resistance. So, what does this mean for the Roma in Italy?

The Roma are victims of a system that allows those in power, or the majority, to define the minority. Thus, they find spaces to live in which authority is absent so that they can live as freely as possible. An active problem in their lives is the government.

The theory of territoriality explains why the Italian government acts as it does. Territory must be classified – no territory is classified as “for the Roma” because they are not seen as legitimate members of society. This is one issue they must face. Territory must have communicated boundaries. In Italy, the boundaries of citizenship for those who belong within the country are communicated through documentation. The Roma fight against documentation because it will blatantly mark them as different and may open them up to legal problems (such as deportation or incarceration) in the future.

Territory must be enforced through policing of borders, property laws, and other means of enforcement of laws and rules within the territory. The Italian government is enforcing its right to control those within its territory by attempting to document and thus mark the Roma. The Roma are afraid that the Italian government may also attempt to enforce its right to dominate its territory by ejecting them from the country. To resist, the

Roma must fight against the tenets of territoriality that the state must follow in order to survive. The Italian state feels that the Roma are an infestation – something to be gotten rid of in order to protect their state. It is difficult to decipher what, exactly, the state feels it must protect. Certainly arguments can be made that the state feels the need to protect its culture as well as its space (Bhopal et al. 2008).

Chapter 4

A Brief History of the Roma 1400-2000²

To understand the situation of the Roma in Italy, it is important to understand their history within Europe both before and after World War II. For a list of important dates in the history of the Roma, see Appendix II. The Roma have undertaken three major trans-European migrations during their history. The first migration, in the 15th century, marked the first large arrival of the Roma in Europe.

The Roma are believed to have originated in Central India as a group of Mahmud of Ghazni's soldiers and their families. Mahmud of Ghazni took his soldiers on many raids during the 1300s. On one of these raids, he and his men were defeated. The remaining soldiers and their families moved west to the Byzantine Empire (Fonseca 1995). They were first documented in Europe in 1322, when a Franciscan monk described a group of former nomads who had settled in Crete. Ludolphus of Sudheim noted a similar group with a similar language in 1350. Corfu saw the first independent Roma fiefdom around 1390 (McDowell 1970: Appendix I).

Though the Gypsies first migrated from India, there is no collective memory of India as a homeland. Rather, different groups or families are often distinguished by the

² The information in these chapters was repeated in many sources. Rather than pick one for each piece of information, I will list them all here as the information can be found in any one of them. In the case of a unique piece of information, I will continue to cite it in the text.

Bhopal et al. "The outsider in multicultural society," in Insiders, Outsiders, and others: Gypsies and identity. London: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2008 (p. 175-200).

Crowe, David M. A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Fonseca, Isabel. Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

Hubert, Marie-Christine (1999) The internment of Gypsies in France. In: Kenrick, Donald (ed.) In the shadow of the Swastika. The Gypsies during the Second World War 2. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, pp. 59-88.

McDowell, Bart. Gypsies: Wanderers of the World. National Geographic Society: 1970.

area in which they have spent the most time. These areas are delineated by the dialect of Roma that is spoken in each region. The different groups consist of those who arrived from central and Eastern Europe from the 1400s onward who named themselves depending on religion, region, or historical occupations. The Kalderdash were named for their cauldron-making skills, the Lovara group dealt in horses, and the Tchurara made sieves. In the 1600s, the Sinti arrived in Western Europe, preceded in the middle ages by the Gitanos who settled in Southern France and remained fairly sedentary. Also, the Tinkers live in Ireland, the Quinquis in Spain, and the Yenishes in Germany.

Many variations in custom and language occur between these groups. However, they share many commonalities that allow them to remain under the umbrella category of Gypsy or Roma. They all share a common language with minor differences in dialogue and accent. Each group traces its history back through oral histories. This may be the reason why so little information exists within academia about the early migration of the Roma to Europe. Many histories are written by anthropologists who have imbedded themselves in the culture for longer than two years in order to learn the language and nuances of the language. Marie-Christine Hubert (1999: 60) claims that trying to define “Gypsies” is pointless. Rather, one should attempt to define what they are not to understand them. She claims that in the end, a Gypsy is simply someone who claims the title. The reason it is so difficult to define the Roma is the lack of a coherent history as well as the lack of continuity between Roma groups.

The history of the Roma is sketchy at best. Most of the information on them from before their arrival in Western Europe in the 1400s is conjecture. The records of individual travelers and scholars are the only evidence of a Roma presence before 1400

when the states began keeping records of the Roma (see Appendix II and the above discussion of the early migration). They arrived in Germany around 1407, France in 1419, the Netherlands in 1420, Italy in 1422, and Spain in 1425. In the 1500s, they reached England and Russia. It was not until the late 1600s that they reached America and Africa, having been deported by the Spanish, Portuguese, and later the British and French (Fonesca 1995: 109).

These deportations were examples of the persecution Roma people faced by the state since their arrival in Europe (see Appendix II). Three policies were implemented in different states: exclusion, reclusion, and inclusion. Director of the Gypsy Research Centre, Jean-Pierre Liégeois, says that

“Bursting in upon societies which the State was attempting to organize and control, these nomads without hearth or home soon promoted suspicion, fear and rejection in local communities rooted in areas with close and closed horizons. Despite their small numbers, they became a matter of concern to peasants and princes, churches and guilds. In response to the general demand, stringent measures were taken to expel incoming groups of Gypsies, and this initially sporadic rejection quickly became an affair of state, with Royal declarations and edicts collectively condemning Gypsies and banishing them on pain of corporal punishment. Such overall rejection of Gypsies usually began shortly after the arrival of the first families. The local populations had no means of defining these new arrivals. Confused by their unclassifiable dress, language, lifestyle and dealings . . . sedentary society very quickly constructed a sinister, repugnant image of Gypsies, inspiring and later justifying action against them. This

image combined sorcery, banditry and propagation of diseases, and a gullible and easily frightened community soon came to see Gypsies as eternally damned. (Liégeois 1994: 45)”

Different policies undertaken had varying levels of effectiveness. For example, exclusion (which included forced evacuation, branding, hanging, other execution methods, and jailing) did not work to dissuade settlement. Most likely these policies did not work because states during this early period did not enact this policy on large portions of the population.

Because exclusion did not work, reclusion was adopted. Reclusion is the violent, authoritarian integration of a population. Hubert (1999: 59-88) writes of the different states in which reclusion was implemented. Spain required the Roma to master a trade and jailed them for traveling in groups. England’s King Charles III demanded they settle and renounce their customs (their colorful dress, the Romani language, and their traveling culture) on pain of death. Reclusion became popular again in the 1900s when the Roma became seen as a socially inept, psychologically damaged race that should be assimilated through government programs.

The general consensus is that the Roma survived because they are a group forced to evolve and adapt. As a result, they became very good at adjusting to their current situation. They use their transience to their benefit, not simply as a pastime. In times of economic hardship, they are likely some of the first to feel the problems. They developed their trademark door-to-door salesmanship in response to economic difficulties. This developed in the 1800s as different groups became focused on one trade (such as metal working) (McDowell 1970, 55).

The second major wave of migration began in the 1850s and continued until the beginning of World War I. This wave of migration continued in waves because of the abolition of slavery in Romanian principalities Moldavia and Valachia. In these principalities, Gypsies had been kept as Crown property since the 1500s. Princes had full control over their slaves, often gifting them to monks or noble families (McDowell 1970: 50). Similar abolitions happened in the Danubian provinces. These freed Gypsies brought Hungarian and Bosnian Roma along with them as they passed through toward the West. During the same period, Manouches and Yenishes spread out around France and groups of Sinti left for France and Belgium and the Kalderash left Romania to travel through Russia and then headed west. Also, economic problems spurred groups to relocate on large scales. The period from about 1850 through the early 1900s was one of high visibility for Roma groups, though the actual numbers of Roma had not increased.

Because of increased visibility, citizens and governments began to respond to the many new Roma as if they were being inundated by a new race of people. France, Switzerland, Belgium, and Bavaria all took steps to expel Roma from their countries or, barring that, to document and track them within the country. This is the genesis of the forced registration which is now occurring in Italy, 90 years later. In 1912, the French government responded by requiring “nomads” to carry anthropometrical record cards that contained the card holder’s civil status, physical characteristics, and fingerprints. This card acted similarly to a modern day passport. The cards had to be stamped every time the person arrived at a new temporary settlement. This fingerprinting and recording of the Roma had tragic consequences during World War II. First, the French government insisted that the Roma have a permanent address (compulsory residence orders), then the

Germans, in October 1940, rounded them up and placed them in camps – the precursors to concentration camps.

In Germany, the Gypsies were given as another reason for the necessity of the new Nazi regime. “The public authorities used them to impose the idea of national unity and to legitimate the need for a centralized police force, which the state saw as one of the most important instruments of its authority. Where Gypsies were concerned, unlike the case of anti-Semitism, society was not the primary force behind discrimination and exclusion but the state itself; it played a decisive role by continually drafting special legislation and using the exclusion of Gypsies as a means of achieving its own unity (Romani Projekt 2009). The German state used the stigmatization of both Jews and the Gypsies to build an internal national unity.

Because of the detailed records dating back to the beginning of the century, the Gypsies were visible targets easy to round-up. In 1942, Hitler ordered the deportation of all Gypsies formerly forced to reside in internment camps. In 1943, the order was given to send all Gypsies from occupied territories to the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. The Gypsies were not sent to work. Rather, they died of hunger, disease, or pseudo-medical experiments performed by Doctor Mengele. It is estimated that between 250,000 and 300,000 Gypsies were murdered throughout WWII.

The fear of nomads was not diminished after the war ended, unfortunately. Nomadic peoples were banned from camping in most European countries. The newly communist eastern European countries banned them from even entering their countries. They were seen as parasites and the few that remained in communist countries were

forced into farming settlements. On the whole, nomadic cultures were prohibited throughout Europe.

The Roma who had not already settled began to choose cities in which to live for long periods of time. Settling offered little security or other benefits, though. Governments forced the Roma to settle while providing them with their menial labor (such as factory work or laundry and cleaning jobs) and salaries on which no one could live, or providing no labor or legislation banning racist hiring practices. Because their governments forced the Roma to remain stationary, they could no longer sell metal or other goods door-to-door. They used their arts and crafts to supplement the meager pay they were getting for the jobs the government forced on them. Thus, they still felt the economic downturns long before the majority of society and they now had no recourse.

Roma populations began to suffer high levels of marginalization after anti-nomad laws were passed in many countries between 1924 and 1950. Fertility rates soared, mortality rates were relatively high, and the age structure reflected the high fertility and death rates with 50 percent more young people than old (Amnesty International 2008). Health issues abounded in Roma settlements due to poor hygiene, malnutrition, and a lifestyle which meant many of them had to spend all day and some nights in the elements.

The third and final major wave of migration happened from 1960 through today. Mainly, the migration was made up of Yugoslav Roma leaving in thousands for Austria, Germany, Italy, and France. The main reason for leaving Yugoslavia was the inability for Roma to make a living in the country. Initially, Yugoslavia banned the emigration, but soon the passport legislation was relaxed which allowed workers to leave on three-month visas. Rather than leaving the area for good, many left to make money then come

back to build homes and support their families. But, upon returning to Yugoslavia, the money ran out and the men were forced to leave again. Many chose to bring their families with them and make an effort to live elsewhere.

This migration increased with the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Economic and social problems worsened during the 1980s for most Roma. With the fall of Communism in the Eastern block countries, a resurgence of nationalism and economic crisis occurred which resulted in a rise in resentment toward those seen as scapegoats for society's woes – mainly minorities and specifically the Roma people.

In 1989, thousands of Roma peoples migrated from Eastern Europe to Germany. With the fall of Communism, they were given the permission to leave in search of work. They moved in hopes of finding better living conditions, education, and job availability. They were authorized to work in Germany by the government and given a small stipend to get them started. However, because they were never given any documents proving their status as legal workers, when the German government changed their minds, they had no recourse but to leave with the order of expulsion. There was no discussion as to where they would be sent if they were to be expelled. The Roma community leaders responded that because the Roma have no homeland, they are only citizens of Europe and thus should be allowed to live and work where they wanted. This argument had little sway.

The three main reasons for the Roma migration west today are to escape discrimination, to make money and return home, and to escape total poverty in hopes of finding a better life elsewhere. Between 200,000 and 280,000 Roma have migrated west from Eastern Europe since the 1960s. Since the 1980s, Roma have gained national

minority status in Bosnia, Macedonia, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary. They lack recognition in all other European states, both those members of the Union and non-members. Minority status grants minorities special compensation in the workforce as well as welfare benefits not available to non-recognized minorities. The lack of membership as a recognized minority is a huge burden for the Roma population. Only 30-40 percent of Roma children attend school regularly and adult illiteracy is beyond 50 percent everywhere (reaching 80-100 percent in some areas) (Amnesty International 2008).

The issue of education for the Roma has been on the agenda at the European level since 1984 when Parliament adopted two resolutions in regard to the issue. The first invited the European Commission to cooperate with member states to devise a means to educate children with no fixed address. The second promoted the use of European and state funds to provide community loans to help improve the standard of living in Roma settlements without destroying their culture through acculturation or assimilation programs. Programs continued to be implemented, though none have shown much success since this time. Thus, the Summit on Roma which occurred in September, 2008, is just another in a long list of programs aimed at assisting the Roma community that has yet to produce any tangible results.

Chapter 5

The Situation of the Roma in Italy Today

The Roma today are deeply affected by their history with the state. They are a people that have migrated in search of a better life, but they have found hatred and institutional discrimination. They face daily antagonism and often violence by vigilante groups and police. Between 140,000 and 170,000 Roma live in Italy today, according estimates made by the Ministry of the Interior (Amnesty International 2008). Half are Italian citizens while the other half are either stateless or citizens of other states (mostly eastern European states).

The Roma community is not recognized as a National Linguistic Minority, thus is does not receive the rights this status provides. The social policies aimed at the Roma in Italy are openly antagonistic; focusing on social inclusion and integration rather than mutual understanding and acceptance. They are denied application of European directives on Linguistic Minorities meant to protect minority languages and peoples as well as the Convention on National Minorities. Often, they are denied basic human rights such as equal housing, health, adequate/equal education, and the right to work (ERRC 2008a). Instead of allowing them to continue living a previously legal nomadic existence, the Italian government has forcibly evicted them from these settlements and located them in “nomad camps” akin to American Indian Reservations. These camps are far outside the boundaries of cities and towns, they are small and walled, and they are often difficult to escape. Contrary to the Italian constitution, the government denies the

rights of Roma individuals (nomads/Gypsies) to reside and move freely within the national territory (Article 3, Italian constitution).

The number of Roma peoples in Italy is purely conjecture. Given the nature of the Roma as nomadic peoples, it is difficult for state and outside organizations to know the number of Roma people in their territory at any given point in time. Amnesty International uses the published state data to inform their approximations. Other estimates range from 130,000 (Human Rights Council 2007) to 150,000 (David 2008).

While many Roma people would like to gain Italian citizenship in order to participate in government programs and to prevent deportation or jailing, it is difficult for them to obtain this citizenship (Amnesty International 2008). Citizenship is attainable only after a residency of four years can be proven. In Italy, a person must prove the length of their residency in Italy through residency permits, a recognized address, or a rental contract. Because the Roma are a mobile people and often do not live in rented houses or apartments, it is impossible for them to prove their residency (*ibid*). Some Italian Roma have lived in Italy since the beginning of WWII and are unable to gain citizenship. Those who are able to apply for residence permits are often refused even if they are able to provide proof of residence (David 2008).

The discrimination of Roma peoples goes beyond denial of citizenship, though. The Italian government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, has been accused by multiple NGOs and other governments of supporting the discrimination against the Roma (Amnesty International 2008, US Dept of State 2009). As the figurehead of the Italian state, Amnesty International (2008) accused Berlusconi of lacking to take any action to counter “the tendency especially from politicians to target,

stigmatize, stereotype and profile people on the basis of race, colour [sic], descent and national or ethnic origin or to use racist propaganda for political purposes.”

In August 2007, the Italian NGO OsservAzione, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), and the European Roma Grassroots Organisation (ERGO) wrote a letter to the Italian Prime Minister insisting that he address the forced evictions occurring around Italy and the mass expulsion of the Roma from their homes (Egenberger 2007). The letter details multiple cases of forced evictions (for a copy of the text of the letter, see Appendix III). In one case in Rome, police evicted more than 1,000 and burned the homes.

In May 2007, the Ministry of Interior signed a “security pact” with local authorities of many major cities. The pact was supposed to improve security in these major cities. It provided for the repression of unauthorized and authorized Roma camps. In Rome, the pact provided for the closure of all Roma camps within the city and the production of four “solidarity villages” outside the city (ENAR 2007). In August 2007, four Roma children (aged 4-10) died in a fire in the shack where they lived with their parents under a motorway near Livorno. The family had moved to avoid the anti-Roma sentiment often aimed at them while they lived closer the municipality. Their home was burned down by a vigilante in response to one of the crimes committed that year by a Roma man (as discussed earlier, 2007 saw a Roma crime wave). In response to this incident, debate arose around the living conditions of Roma peoples and the state’s role in creating and/or maintaining the marginalization of the Roma.



Figures 5 and 6: The legal camp is located on the left; the illegal shantytown on the right.

Since the relocation of many of these villages, vigilante action against Roma settlements has increased. On October 14, 2007, Molotov cocktails were thrown at a Roma settlement in Turin. The inhabitants were unharmed, but their trailers and the rest of the camp were burned to the ground. Most of the inhabitants lost their personal documents in the fire.

After the murder of an Italian woman by a Roma man on October 31, 2007, the country exploded in anti-Roma action. The murder had been witnessed by a Roma woman who, with the help of a bus driver, informed the police and helped them identify the murderer. The next day, an unauthorized settlement near Rome was destroyed by the police and all its inhabitants were “identified” (ENAR 2007: 21). Three days later, the largest Roma camp in Rome was destroyed. Just two weeks following, the government issued 187 expulsion orders against Romanian citizens (Roma Romanians). During this same period, the Forza Nuova, a far-right vigilante group, is reported to have orchestrated

numerous attacks on Roma including the attack on three Romanian boys with sticks and knives, the stabbing of a 22-year-old Romanian, the bombing of a shop that sold Romanian products, and the painting of a swastika on the same shop.

In early May, it was reported that a young Roma woman attempted to kidnap a young child (Viaggio 2007). Following, on May 13, 2008, 100 people converged upon a Roma camp in Pontecelli in Naples with bats and Molotov cocktails. They threw stones and started fires in the camp. Eight hundred Roma were forced to leave their settlement. While they ran from their homes, many were attacked and beaten. Later that same month, a Roma woman who was six-months pregnant was beaten outside a bar. It is reported that those who saw the incident made no move to help the woman or call the police or an ambulance (Amnesty International 2008). These attacks have not slowed down in the last year, nor has the government made any move to diminish vigilante action. Amnesty International (2008) has called for a censure of the Italian government due to its unwillingness to keep the Roma within its borders safe.



Figure 7: A burned Roma settlement outside Rome.

A link has been made between anti-Roma sentiments expressed by the government and individual politicians and attacks on Roma settlements and individuals. A group of UN experts state that the explicit links made between the Roma and criminality and the call for the immediate dismantling of Roma camps has created an “environment of hostility, antagonism, and stigmatization of the Roma community among the general public; this climate of anti-Roma sentiment has served to mobilize extremist groups, which have recently launched a series of attacks against Roma camps and individuals” (*ibid*). One response to outcries against this violence came from Gianfranco Fini, the leader of the right-wing National Alliance. He referred to the Roma as “people who don’t accept integration because they don’t accept values and principles of the host society,” and continued with, “I wonder how it is possible to integrate people who think that theft is lawful and not immoral, who don’t work because only women should do so, often by resorting to prostitution and who have no scruples in kidnapping or

having children to use as beggars. Talking about integration for people who have this kind of culture does not make sense” (Di Caro 2007).

On June 25, 2008, an initiative to conduct a census of Roma settlements was presented to Parliament by the Minister of Interior, Roberto Maroni (ERRC 2007). This census would consist of the fingerprinting and registration of Roma children and adults. The initiative began in some cities just months after the announcement.

On July 10, 2008, the European Parliament took up a position against this policy. It urged Italy to refrain from fingerprinting the Roma or using fingerprints already collected because “this would clearly constitute an act of direct discrimination based on race and ethnic origin” (European Parliament resolution of 10 July 2008). It also claimed that fingerprinting would neither prevent crime nor increase security. Rather, the action would be unambiguously discriminatory toward the Roma peoples. One cannot help but draw similarities between this measure and those taken during the Holocaust led by the Nazis. This comparison was made by the Secretary-General of the council of Europe, Terry Davis (2008) who said that “this proposal invites historical analogies which are so obvious that they do not even have to be spelled out. While I believe that the Italian democracy and its institutions are mature enough to prevent any such ideas becoming laws, I am nevertheless concerned that a senior member of the government of one of the council of Europe’s member states is reported to have made such a proposal.”

After the harsh criticism leveled at the government by the COE’s commissioner for human rights, the media, and NGOs, the Italian government adjusted the decree. Now, fingerprinting will only be required for those living in encampments [read: Roma] who are without identification documents and are over the age of fourteen (Davis 2008).

Several other legislative measures have been taken that appear to be aimed directly at the Roma community. Law Decree 92.08 amends the Italian Penal Code to make it possible for irregular migrants to have to serve up to three times the penalty for any crime committed (Modification of Article 61 Italian Penal Code). Besides the fact that this law is obviously directed at the Roma and is clearly discriminatory, it also contradicts the Italian constitution which guarantees equality before the law (Article 3).

This same Law Decree makes renting accommodation to an irregular migrant a punishable offense. Offenders can be given six months to three years in prison. Since many Roma cannot get the proper documents to become classified as other-than irregular migrants, this law affects them directly. The apartment in question will be confiscated and sold while the money raised from the sale will be put into fighting crimes related to irregular migration (Amnesty International 2008: 17). The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommend that Italy “act firmly against local measures denying residence to Roma and the unlawful expulsion of Roma, and to refrain from placing Roma in camps outside populated areas that are isolated and without access to health care and other basic facilities” (Concluding Observations on Italy 2008).

The European commission on Roma

On September 16, 2008, the European Commission held its first EU Roma Summit which took place in Brussels. Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso and the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union lead the meeting. The European Commission’s press release claimed that the Roma are in a particularly difficult situation because they are the least socially integrated ethnic minority in Europe. The

fourteen obstacles to success for minorities are: “lack of education and training; lack of language skills; lack of recognition of skills and qualifications; lack of access to professions; lack of access to citizenship; lack of integration policies; stereotypes, prejudices and negative attitudes; industrial change; disincentives through welfare systems; discrimination; lack of information; labour [sic] market competition; and undeclared work” (European Roma Summit 2008: 1). The Roma are the only minority group widely affected by all fourteen of these barriers to success.

The community has a high percentage of birth per woman and has produced a population with an unusually high percentage of children (60% of the Roma population is less than 18 years old; 47% of children are from 6 to 14 years old; 23% of children are between 15 and 18 years old; the remaining percentage of children (30%) are between 0 and 5 years old) (Human Rights Council 2007). Roma children face especially harsh problems in Italy. Many are sent to special schools instead of being integrated into the normal school system. This segregated system produces unequal education for Roma children and prompts many to drop-out at an early age. Almost 40 percent of Roma children are taught in segregated schools while another 20 percent are taught in “special” classes or by different instructors (Mohácsi 2008c). Life expectancy for the Roma in Italy is still strikingly low (40 to 50 years) while family planning information is woefully inadequate

Thus, the premise for the Summit was to facilitate serious, Europe-wide discussion about the “Roma problem” (*ibid*). The press release included a list of all those involved in the Summit. The direct representation of the Roma was important to the event, the document claimed (European Commission press release 2008). Thus, two

members of the European Parliament who were of Roma origin would be included. The Summit has been widely criticized in the media and by Roma rights groups for including only token representatives from the Roma community.

The two Roma Members of the European Parliament were Livia Járóka and Viktória Mohácsi. Livia Járóka as a Member of the European Parliament is not a typical Roma. Járóka has never lived on the street or in a Roma settlement. She was brought up in the best schools and raised in a middle-class home. She has been in Parliament for a shorter time than her counterpart and thus has less pull and has made less of an impact. Viktória Mohácsi, however, is highly vocal on Roma issues. She grew up educated, earned an MA in sociology from Central European University Warsaw, went on to study anthropology in Britain with a focus on Roma issues and culture, and is now a PhD student at the University College London.

Contrary to the detractors who claim these women attended the Summit to be seen rather than heard, Viktória Mohácsi seems the perfect person to represent her people at the Summit. She has spent her time studying the Roma phenomenon from a sociological perspective, she has lived in the community, and she often visits communities in which conflicts are occurring so that she can give accurate reports to Parliament and clear up misunderstandings or misrepresentations of the problem (2008a, 2008b). Mohácsi spends much of her time in Parliament working towards acceptance of Roma in society. She and the other members of the Committee on Culture and Education and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs worked to promote a three-pronged social program in regard to the Roma in Italy and the EU at large.

The three prongs were a new horizontal directive to deal with integration of the 10 million Roma currently in the 27 member states, the adoption of an EU Roma strategy, and financial and other support from the EU on Europe-wide and state levels for the implementation of integration programs as stipulated by the proposed horizontal directive. Mohácsi attended the Summit in hopes that these three issues could be proposed and debated in a large forum devoted solely to the bettering of Roma quality of life.

However, she left the Summit disappointed. In an interview the night of the Summit, Ms. Mohácsi claimed she was “not even satisfied... because for the next four or five years, 10 million people will not have [a] responsible integration package from [the] EU” (2008b). Mohácsi intimates that because the Commissioners paid little attention to the Roma at the conference, the issues they proposed were never raised. Instead, the Summit was strictly organized in a series of talks given by the Commissioners and panels on which no Roma sat and during which questions were highly controlled (Villarreal 2008).

The Summit did not produce any concrete changes in legislation in the EU or in the Member countries. Rather, it resulted in the proposal of more summits and committees. The Roma Summit did make any significant steps toward promoting a fairer situation for the Roma in Italy. Like many of the previous gatherings about the “Roma problem,” it identified the problem and then left the state to do all the work.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The Roma people have been living in Italy since 1422. In 587 years, the situation has changed little; laws are still being made to prevent them from living in the way they would like and they are still discriminated against on the basis of their race. They have been repressed by different European states in every imaginable way. Yet, the Roma persevere. There are still 10 million in 27 member states; and an estimated 150,000 live in Italy, one of the most repressive (toward all minority groups but with a special emphasis on the Roma) governments in the European Union. The Roma have sustained family ties throughout hundreds of years and manage to remain a tight-knit community in many places despite all they must face on a daily basis.

The Roma defy the state through passive means. These means were not devised by Roma leaders. Rather, they are products of years of repression and the inability to fight back without terrible retribution. Essentially, repressive states have molded the Roma strategy of resistance. By simply existing on the margins of society, the Roma challenge the power of the state. They incite debate and bring about conversations about equality and justice that may never have occurred without them. These conversations, then, can be broadened to encapsulate the entire system of state power versus minority powerlessness. Every minority situation can benefit from this discussion.

I began the project thinking that the Roma should be fighting back. How a group so repressed could simply allow it to happen, I could not understand. But as I researched more and more, I discovered that the issue is much more nuanced. These people have survived almost 600 years as a persecuted race. They had a period in which they fought

persecution and it earned them death. So, they moved into a period as constant nomads. By running from persecution, they escaped for years at a time before a community would decide they were a problem and the persecution would begin again. Now they are a community wiser because of their history. They understand that resistance must only occur when something threatens their lives; resistance is the last measure to be taken. The state took their information and used it to round them up and slaughter them. Distrust of the state is a trait passed down from generation to generation. After all, the Holocaust is still just one generation away. The memory is fresh.

The cultural ties that link the Roma together have created an identity bond that aids their survival. The state has identified them as a group with its own distinctive culture which challenges the state's power to control its citizens. The Roma challenge Italian norms of territoriality and belonging in society. As a result, the Italian state has been trying to squash their distinctiveness and their defiance since 1493 when they first banished them from Italian territory. Because the Roma have succeeded in maintaining a strong cultural association with one another instead of Italian society, they threaten the very concept of the state; states must maintain a culture that supports their rule, or they face mutiny. They also occupy spaces of resistance which is seen as an open affront to the Italian state. Thus, the Italian state has resorted to the only outlet open to it: violent suppression.

In resorting to such drastic measures, the Italian state is shown its weakness when it comes to dealing with the Roma. This example can easily be applied to similar situations of power struggles throughout the world; the US-Mexico border and the Irish

conflict with Muslim immigrants are two good examples of similar situations in which territoriality is openly being defied by minority groups.

Resistance looks different in Roma communities. They can resist by fighting for equal education for their children so that they need not live in poverty. They resist by using the relocation mandated by the government as a means to secure more stable work. While these days the Roma culture is being slowly squashed by the Italian government, the important bits remain. The sense of community is still present as is the colorful, eclectic collection of clothing, music, and furniture one can sense in Roma communities – both legal and illegal. Just by existing, the Roma challenge the state that has tried for centuries to extinguish their race.

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Appendix I Photographs

Photographs were taken from the slideshow on the Guardian's website entitled, "Inside Italian Gypsy Camps." All of the photographs were taken by Robin Hammond.

Available at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/gallery/2008/aug/17/roma.italy?picture=336590505>

These include:

Figure 1: Roma man begging in front of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Italy.

Figure 2: A Roma family performing and begging on a subway car.

Figure 3: Violetta stands second from the left; Cristina is next to her in the black dress.

Figure 4: The girls' bodies near some of the picnickers

Figures 5 and 6: The legal camp is located on the left; the illegal shantytown on the right.

Figure 7: A burned Roma settlement outside Rome.

Appendix II

Chronology of Some Important Dates in Roma History

1180-90	First recorded presence of Roma: Theodore Balsamon records the presence of <i>Athinganoi</i> (Roma) in Constantinople.
1200	Athanasius, Patriarch of Constantinople, instructs the Byzantine clergy to forbid their parishioners from associating with <i>Athinganoi</i> “because they teach devilish things.”
1322	Roma presence at Candia, in Crete, is reported.
1340	Slavery begins in the Ottoman-controlled Balkans.
1399	The first report of a Roma presence in Bohemia.
1407	The first record of Roma in Germany, at Hildesheim.
1416	The first German anti-Roma law is issued. Forty-eight more follow between this date and 1774.
1418	First report of a Roma presence in Switzerland and France.
1419	First report of a Roma presence in Belgium.
1420	First report of a Roma presence in Holland.
1422	First report of a Roma presence in Italy at Forli
1423	First report of a Roma presence in Slovakia.
1425	First report of a Roma presence in Spain.
1444	A Venetian document describes a settled military community of Roma in Nauplia, in Venetian Peloponnesia, whose leader (called the drungus ciganorum) was named Johannes Cinganus, “John the Gypsy.”
1478	Roma are imprisoned and tortured in the Spanish Inquisition.
1493	Italian law banishes Roma from Milan
1498	Roma expelled from the German-speaking territories in the holy Roman Empire.
1483-1749	Roma expelled from Germany, France, Switzerland (death penalty ordered), Bavaria, Portugal, Sweden, England, Slovakia, Denmark, Spain, Scotland, Italy, Bohemia, Poland, Lithuania, Scotland, Norway, Denmark, Belarus
	1568 Pope orders expulsion from Holy Roman Church
	1638 Swedish government proposes to transport them to Delaware
	1661 England transports them to Jamaica and Barbados as slaves
	1721 Germany orders extermination of all Roma
1782	Hungary – 200 Roma arrested and tortured until they confess to cannibalism
1830	France – Roma children removed to live with non-Roma families
1842	Moldova – frees slaves
1907	Increasing anti-Roma activity in Germany; influx of Roma into Western Europe
1922	Baden – all Roma fingerprinted and photographed
1927	Prussia – Roma photographed, fingerprinted, ID cards. Not allowed to own firearms or travel in groups
1928	Germany – Roma placed under permanent police surveillance
1930	Norway – journalist recommends all Roma be sterilized

1933 Germany – Nazi’s legalize sterilization of Gypsies, blacks
1934 Germany – Gypsies may not marry non-Gypsies, sexual relations forbidden, rounded up and put in camps. 300,000 murdered during WWII.
1950 Roma refused war crime reparations because they were persecuted under the National Socialist regime not for any racial reason, but because of an antisocial criminal record.
1989 Communism falls in Europe, rise in ethnic nationalism
Germany pays \$20,000 to Roma to take back thousand of Roma
1992 UN Commission on Human Rights passes resolution to protect Roma
1994 England – nomadism criminalized
1996 Czech Republic – Roma banned from public swimming pools
1998 New Jersey – last anti-Roma law in USA rescinded
2000 USA – census forms distributed in Roma for the first time
Greece – government forcibly removes Roma from streets in anticipation of the Olympic Games (just as Spain did in 1992 and Germany did in 1936)

Appendix III

Honourable Excellencies,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and osservAzione are writing today to request your urgent intervention in the wake of “Pacts for Security” in Rome and Milan, signed by various authorities on 18 May 2007, which reportedly foresee the forced eviction of more than 10,000 Roma from their homes. The Pacts were signed in the midst of racist media statements by the same authorities, apparently intended to fuel anti-Roma attitudes in Italy and secure broad support for the impending illegal actions.

The European Roma Rights Centre is a public interest law organisation that works to combat human rights abuse of Roma in Europe. osservAzione is a non governmental organisation engaging in a range of activities aimed at combating anti-Roma racism and human rights abuse of Roma and Sinti in Italy.

The Rome Pact was signed by the Prefect of Rome, the Mayor of Rome, the President of the Province of Rome and the President of the Region of Lazio, in the presence of the Minister of Interior (also a signatory). According to the Rome Pact, commencing this week a joint commission of the regional government will be established which will have 3 months to identify locations for 4 “villages of solidarity” on the periphery of Rome and another 9 months to build pre-fabricated container houses and prepare the areas for inhabitation by 4,000 Roma. At the same time, a task force of 150 police officers (75 from the military and 75 from the state police) is being set up to “rehabilitate the areas.”

The Milan Pact was signed by the Prefect of Milan and the Mayor of Milan, in the presence of Vice-Minister of Interior (also a signatory). The Milan Pact agrees to reduce criminality and to address the problem of unauthorised camps for Nomads. Within 3 months of signing the Pact, the responsible authorities must “define a strategy in which extraordinary power will be given to the Prefect to implement the strategic plan for solving the Roma emergency in Milan.” The Pact also foresees the “intensification of controls” on the periphery (where many Roma live) to guarantee the security of Milan residents.

Media coverage surrounding the Pacts has been explicitly racist, the result of direct quotes from Italian authorities published by mainstream Italian newspapers, without any kind of editorial remark. The most alarming article was published on 19 May 2007 by the Italian national newspaper La Repubblica, entitled: “Prefect Serra: Those who live in the squatter settlements must go. Police to control order in the camps. And in the capital, order increases: “Away with 10,000 unregistered Roma”.

The article was based on statements made by Mr Achille Serra, the Prefect of Rome, who announced the “Pact for Security in Rome”. According to Mr Serra, “ten thousand [Roma] who live in squatter settlements on the banks of the Tiber and the Aniene must

go”, while only 4,000 places will be made available in the “villages of solidarity”. Many of the Roma concerned are reportedly from Romania. Mr Serra has reportedly been granted “unlimited power” within all institutions and organisations relevant. Mr Serra made explicitly racist remarks about Roma, referring to them as Nomads and recalling a personal visit to existing camps. Mr Serra was quoted as having stated:

“[...] at ten o’clock in the morning I saw children, dirty, playing with a ball. [...] The women were not around because they are at the metro stealing purses and the men were sleeping because perhaps they worked all night robbing apartments.”

Regarding the real purpose of the task force established in Rome, Mr Serra was quoted as having stated that the task force will begin systematically patrolling the existing camps, “encouraging the Nomads to leave. If they return, the police officers will remove them again and this will continue until they understand that they must go somewhere else.” According to La Repubblica, Mr Serra plans that by the time the “villages of solidarity” are completed, 10,000 Roma will have been removed from the center of the city and the task force will shift their responsibilities to “preventing the villages from becoming a centre of car theft, weapons, drugs, and prostitution.”

Honourable Excellencies,

On 21 December 2005, the European Committee of Social Rights unanimously concluded that Italy had violated Article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter taken together with Article E, with respect to the insufficiency and inadequacy of camping sites for Roma in Italy, that the recurrent forced eviction of Roma by Italian authorities, and the lack of permanent dwellings made available for Roma. The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted this decision on 3 May 2006 in Resolution ResChS(2006)4.

In this light, the Pacts for Security signed in Rome and Milan are especially worrying and call into question the commitment of the Italian government to upholding the various international treaties it has ratified that guarantee respect for the right to housing and freedom against forced eviction, including the Revised European Social Charter and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. They also indicate a total disregard for the findings of the European Committee of Social Rights and the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers.

The ERRC and osservAzione call on you to use the powers of your office to rescind the racist Pacts for Security and ensure respect for the housing rights of the Roma implicated, many of whom will apparently be made homeless. We request that you comply with your international law obligations and adopt housing policies and programmes which avoid homelessness and the further segregation of Roma, and which provide real and adequate housing solutions for the Roma currently living in squatter settlements in Italy.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you further. We respectfully request to be informed of actions undertaken by your office in this regard.

Thank you very much for your attention to this most urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Vera Egenberger
Executive Director
ERRC