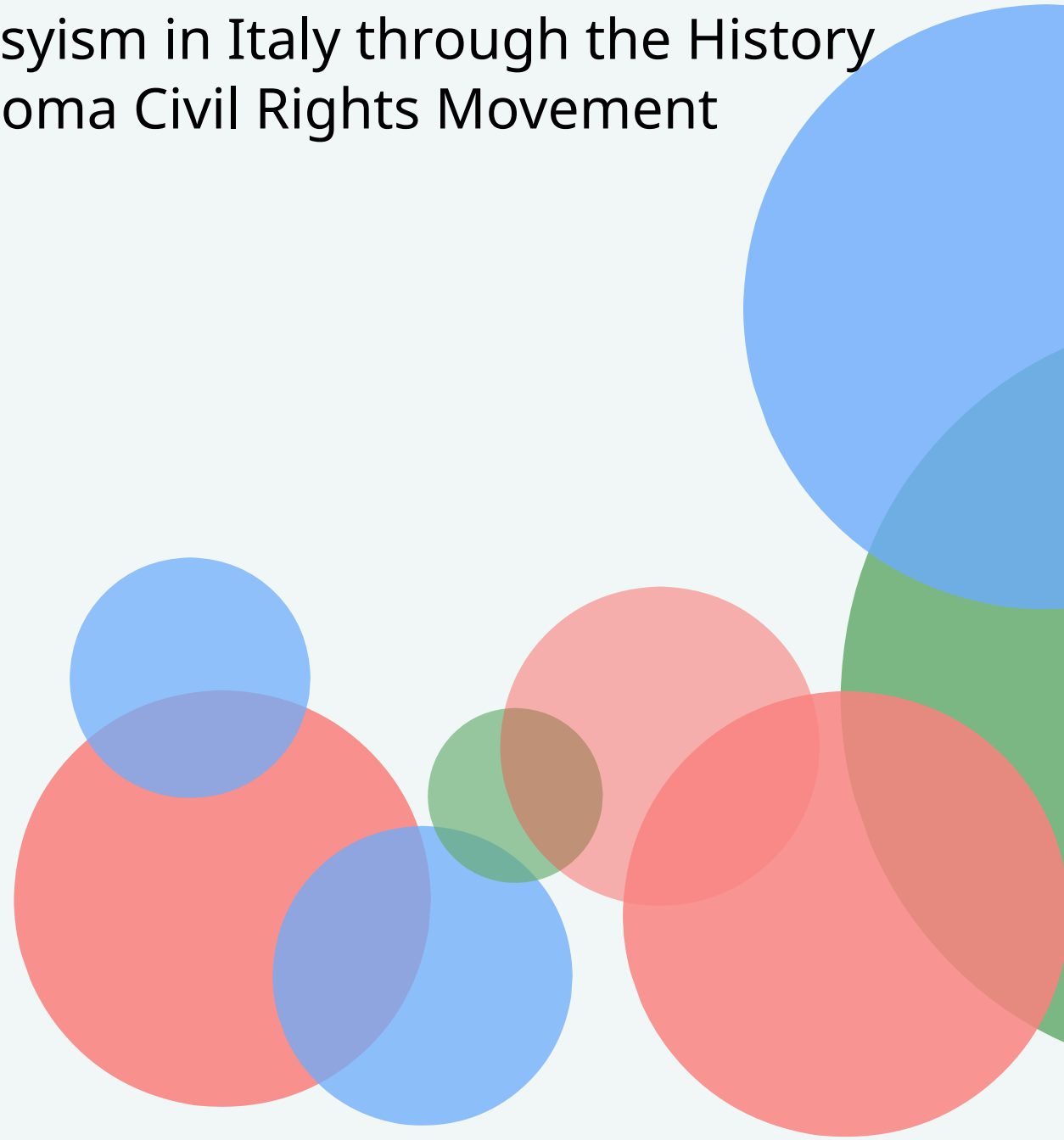
Antigypsyism in Italy through the History of the Roma Civil Rights Movement



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2025

European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC)

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JEKHIPE
RECLAIMING OUR PAST, REBUILDING OUR FUTURE:
NEW APPROACHES TO FIGHTING ANTIGYPSYISM

The JEKHIPE Project

The JEKHIPE project *Reclaiming our past, rebuilding our future: new approaches to fighting antigypsyism against Roma* is a CERV-funded project aimed at improving the lives of Roma by addressing systemic and institutional antigypsyism, promoting transitional justice, fostering knowledge-building and awareness, and strengthening Roma identity and participation.

It is a follow-up to *CHACHIPEN*, an earlier CERV project, officially titled *Paving the way for a Truth and Reconciliation Process to address antigypsyism in Europe*. *Remembrance, Recognition, Justice and Trust-Building*. Concluded in 2023, CHACHIPEN introduced an innovative transitional justice-based approach to raising awareness of systemic injustice and ongoing antigypsyism in policymaking, while advocating for a comprehensive truth and reconciliation strategy.

JEKHIPE focuses on multiple levels of policy-making, including research, monitoring, advocacy, networking, alliances building, awareness raising, capacity building, and empowerment. It aims to engage with national and European institutions, academia, politicians, justice mechanisms, state authorities, civil society, and Roma communities themselves to challenge the status quo on approaching Roma issues, particularly antigypsyism, and propose mechanisms for increased accountability by national governments.

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Part One

1. Theoretical and methodological framework

This research is being conducted in Italy as part of the JEKHIPE project – Recovering Our Past, Rebuilding Our Future: New Approaches to Combating Anti-Gypsyism. The project is funded by the European Commission under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) program. The JEKHIPE consortium includes ERIAC, ERGO Network, the Center for European Policy Studies, and eight Romani civil society organizations from Sweden, Germany, Spain, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Italy.

The research aims to provide an overview of historical and current manifestations of anti-Gypsyism, including systemic, institutional, and structural forms such as state and non-state violence, persecution, and systemic discrimination against Roma and Sinti communities in the Italian context. It also aims to highlight documented and underrepresented cases of Roma resistance, solidarity, and resilience against anti-Gypsyism, with a particular focus on individual and collective forms of mobilization and the emergence of civil rights movements for Roma and Sinti. Finally, it aims to analyze the history of Roma communities, with a focus on the local context and the contributions of Roma arts and culture to identity, memory, and political struggle, to demonstrate how Roma artistic and cultural production has served as a means of resisting antigypsyism and promoting positive narratives.

The analysis has been divided into two parts.

In the first part of the research, the first chapter describes the methodology and research tools, clarifying the concept of antigypsyism through definitions provided by international Roma and non-Roma institutions, as well as the words of Italian activists and scholars who have dealt with the phenomenon over time. In the following three chapters, the study analyzes, from a diachronic and historical perspective, the events that best represent the practices and acts of antigypsyism that have occurred in the country, as well as the historical and cultural contexts that produced them, from the 1920s to the present day. The analysis will attempt to outline the theories and motivations behind acts and practices of hatred and discrimination against Roma and Sinti communities, describing the characteristics they have taken on in the Italian context.

The second part of the research report will reconstruct the history of the Roma civil rights movement in Italy through the memories, testimonies, and reflections of its protagonists. In addition, it will provide an overview of the current situation and the dynamics and demands that characterize the movement today. In this part of the discussion, the reconstruction of the history of the Roma and Sinti civil rights movement takes on specific meaning in light of the historical insights provided in the previous section: reconstructing the responses of the Roma and Sinti communities during decades of negotiations and conflicts with the majority community around pillars that have been reinforced and monitored over time: housing, education, access to work, and public health services. Inevitably, therefore, we reconstruct the policies of public institutions and, therefore, of an entire society towards its minority. To date, it is possible to distinguish two generations corresponding to two phases within the movement, which will be analysed as

follows: an old guard of "pioneers" with their organizations, some linked to international organizations, others to academia, and still others to Catholic or Evangelical religious organizations with a history of local and political struggles. Around them are families, volunteers, collaborators, and supporters who are Roma and Sinti, but also non-Roma and non-Sinti. The second generation is a new wave of activism led by "Artivists" and influencers trained by European and international organizations, but well rooted in the local social fabric in which it was formed, which creates petitions and social campaigns, expresses itself mainly through web platforms, and finds its adherence to the movement also in artistic expression. The research also provides a selection of the most significant examples of responses to antigypsyism through various art forms, from music to visual and performing arts, from theater to literature, which can be found in the Italian context.

From a methodological perspective, the research was conducted from June 2025 to September 2025. It involved a diachronic bibliographic survey of the contemporary history of Roma and Sinti groups in Italy from the twenty years of Fascism to the present day, with a focus on the acts of antigypsyism that have had the greatest impact on communities, through quantitative and qualitative research reports, texts by leaders of Roma and Sinti organizations involved in the civil rights movement, and anthropological studies of Roma groups in the Italian context.
In addition, ethnographic interviews with leaders and activists from some of the associations, as well as the analysis of material produced over time, have enabled the reconstruction of the history of the Roma civil rights movement in Italy.
Finally, through the methodology of participant observation of events and demonstrations that took place before the period covered by the research, the dynamics that currently describe both activism in its current forms and the relationship between the Roma and Sinti communities and institutions have been outlined, describing the characteristics of contemporary "anti-Gypsyism."
This research does not aim to be exhaustive or comprehensive. The selection was made based on the reflections of the Roma and Sinti interlocutors involved, as well as the most influential contributions from social science. Instead, it aims to present an illustrative overview that can serve as a starting point for further study and to identify guidelines for future reflection.

1.1 Defining anti-Gypsyism

In the Italian legal and regulatory context, antigypsyism is not considered a specific form of discrimination, despite having been identified in recent times in public debate thanks to pressure from European institutions.
Briefly, to contextualize future references, it is worth noting that Italian legislation addresses racism and discrimination in general through Law No. 654 of October 13, 1975, which ratifies and implements the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted in 1966. The law introduces the crime of propaganda and incitement to commit crimes on grounds of racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination and is the

comprehensive law against racism in Italy. It was amended by Law No. 205 of June 25, 1993, also known as the Mancino Law, named after the then Minister of the Interior Nicola Mancino, who presented it to parliament, which contains "urgent measures on racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination." Law 205/93 introduced the crime of discrimination, hatred, or violence on racial, ethnic, national, or religious grounds, as well as the crime of condoning crimes against humanity and Holocaust denial and other Nazi-Fascist crimes, and certain specific penalties.

In 1999, the Italian legal system regulated the general concept of minority - linking it to linguistic peculiarities as a constitutional principle (Art. 6 of the Constitution: "The Republic protects linguistic minorities with specific regulations") through Law No. 482 of December 15, 1999, containing "Regulations on the protection of linguistic-historical minorities," which recognizes and protects twelve linguistic minorities: Albanian, Catalan, Germanic, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian, French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan, and Sardinian, taking into account linguistic-historical criteria, but above all the criterion of territoriality/permanence, i.e., location in a given territory. As we will see in detail in the course of this discussion, the prevalence of the principle of "territoriality" effectively excludes the Roma and Sinti minorities from the provisions of the law, as they are a "diffuse minority," i.e., without a recognizable territorial concentration.

The last of these regulations that we present, which regulates the constitutional principle of 'equal social dignity' and equality before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions', is Legislative Decree No. 215 of July 9, 2003, which implements Directive 2000/43/EC on equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.

The aforementioned decree contains a terminological categorization, which has not yet been revised and does not specifically include the Roma and Sinti communities, which defines various forms of discrimination and helps us to narrow down the debate in the Italian context. The guiding criteria of the decree outline forms of: direct discrimination "when an individual or group of people is treated less favourably [...] because of their ethnic, racial, national, religious, political, and cultural background or sexual orientation" (Art. 29 Legislative Decree 215/2003); indirect discrimination "when an apparently neutral provision, criterion, behaviour, practice, or agreement may, intentionally or unintentionally, place persons of a particular 'race' or ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, etc. at a particular disadvantage" (Legislative Decree 215/2003); institutional discrimination, which "takes the form of practices and/or procedures that, while not explicitly intended to discriminate, in practice do so systematically, excluding certain groups from certain opportunities"; multiple discrimination, "when the same person is discriminated against on several grounds and in relation to several characteristics" with a "cumulative effect of discrimination"; also included are incitement to hatred as "the dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority and hatred" and harassment as "unwanted behaviour based on race, ethnic origin, religion, personal beliefs, sexual orientation, etc., with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of the person and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment." (Legislative Decree 215/2003).

The decree also establishes, within the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of

the Council of Ministers, the Office for the Promotion of Equal Treatment and the Removal of Discrimination based on Race or Ethnic Origin, known as UNAR (National Office Against Racial Discrimination), with the function of guaranteeing and monitoring equal treatment and the effectiveness of instruments for the protection against discrimination based on race or ethnic origin. From this point on, UNAR, which we will discuss in conclusion to this first part of the research, will be the main interlocutor and intermediary for institutions. In 2012, it will be designated as the national contact point for the implementation of the Roma Inclusion Strategy, Sinti and Caminanti 2012-2020, created to follow up on Communication No. 173 of 2011 of the European Commission in the "EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020."

It is clear from the above that the Roma and Sinti communities have entered the Italian institutional framework thanks to external pressure and that, although UNAR has had a specific division focusing on discrimination against Roma and Sinti since its establishment, this has not been translated into national legislation.

The need for a national strategy arises in a context of failure of institutional measures and constitutes a first attempt at cooperation for organic interventions aimed at Roma and Sinti communities, However, in the implementation of the first strategy, it appears that antigypsyism has had a negative impact on the achievement of the objectives, to the extent that the actors involved have identified antigypsyism as one of the axes of the 2021-2030 National Strategy, which is still in force. antigypsyism

The National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma and Sinti 2021-2030, implementing the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of March 12, 2021 (2021/C 93/01) adopts the definition of antigypsyism by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), which describes it as:

> A particularly persistent, violent, recurrent, and common form of racism, linked to an ideology based on racial superiority, it is a form of dehumanization and institutional racism fuelled by historical discrimination, which is expressed, among other things, through violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatization, and the most overt forms of discrimination.[1]

The definition of antigypsyism commonly shared in international debate was adopted in October 2020 by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), which codifies it as:

> A manifestation of individual expressions and acts, as well as institutional policies and practices of marginalization, exclusion, physical violence, devaluation of Romani cultures and ways of life, and incitement to hatred directed at Roma and other individuals and

[1] https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/recommendation-no.13

> groups perceived, stigmatized, or persecuted during the Nazi era and still today as "gypsies." This leads to treating Roma as a supposedly alien group and associates them with a series of pejorative stereotypes and distorted images that represent a specific form of racism.[2]

The two definitions agree in addressing antigypsyism as a specific form of racism, a dimension which, as we have seen, has not yet been incorporated into legislation. They also agree on including institutional, social, and individual acts and practices that involve both direct violence and discrimination and the repetition of stigmatizing and pejorative stereotypes of entire communities.
However, there are some differences that we consider to be of great importance in the Italian context. The ECRI definition reiterates the historicity of discriminatory acts, associating them not exclusively with the 'Nazi era' as a starting point, but with an ideology of racial superiority that found some of its most significant theorists in Italy, well before Nazism and Fascism incorporated it as their own. Above all, the definition sets out the directions of antigypsyism as a specific form of racism: dehumanization and institutional racism. In our opinion, for an analysis of the specificities of Italy, it is necessary to give priority to these two dimensions, both because of the impact they have had on the individual and collective histories of members of the Roma and Sinti communities, and because it is necessary to emphasize how the dynamics that have characterized and continue to characterize Italian antigypsyism revolve mainly around practices of institutional racism, which have involved and continue to involve all secular and religious state and local administrative bodies and apparatuses, educational and protective institutions, and legal institutions to varying degrees over the decades with which the Roma and Sinti communities have had to negotiate their right to exist.

2. Historical roots: From Fascism to the post-war period (1922-1948)

The persecution and internment of Roma and Sinti in Italy has been the subject of in-depth historiographical and anthropological research over the last twenty years, and even today there is still no comprehensive understanding of it. The drive for further study stems from the communities' need to recount the Porrajmos, to understand and share this painful moment in their history. Until this desire matured, in academia the issue of deportation and internment had "always represented a sort of hasty juxtaposition to what happened in Germany during the Nazi regime" (Bravi, 2007, p. 35). Currently, historical hypotheses are divided into two camps: some theories interpret the persecution and internment that took place in Italy during the twenty years of Fascism and during the Second World War as the result of a public security policy, while

[2] https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antigypsyism-anti-roma-discrimination

the second camp interprets them as persecution dictated by racial inferiority[3] . According to historian Luca Bravi:

> The first and most widespread is that of Mirella Karpati, according to whom the internment of Roma in Italy took place solely for reasons of public security, i.e., at the behest of a regime concerned with controlling individuals hypothetically prone to crime. the second, expressed first and with due caution and differentiation by Giovanna Boursier, is still a working hypothesis and questions the sources to clarify whether, even in Italy, we can speak of racial persecution carried out or about to be organized against the Roma.

We will therefore attempt to explore these two positions in depth, examining the events and phases that characterized this period, which we consider fundamental because it contains all the anti-Gypsy positions that we will analyze in this report. These positions did not disappear with the end of the world war and the dictatorship, but were transformed, insinuated themselves, and crystallized in institutions and common sentiment.
At the same time, we will show how the response of the communities, although unspoken and unrecognized for years, was immediate and distinguished by commitment and participation, in stark contrast to the accusations and stigma of "asociality" that had motivated their forced removal.

2.1 The fascist regime and racial laws

The Fascist Party, already present in parliament, took control of the Italian government in 1922 following well-known historical events. In the years that followed, a series of freedom-destroying measures known as the "Leggi Fascistissime" (Fascist Laws) were introduced, leading to a gradual transformation of the country. The first fascist measures specifically targeting the communities then known as "gypsies" were part of this context of social discipline and repression and took the form of measures restricting their movement and entry into the country. In this regard, we recall the Circular Dispatch of the Ministry of the Interior No. 11352, " d Entry of Gypsies into the Kingdom" of August 25, 1924, addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Consulates. This is the first official measure of the twenty-year Fascist period dealing with "the presence of gypsies in the territory of the Kingdom," even if only those coming from abroad. The Ministry "proposes that, in the future, entry visas to the Kingdom should not be granted to caravans of gypsies or individuals belonging to them." Below is the Circular of the Ministry of the

[3] We report the bibliography provided by the author Luca Bravi in the cited text: "With reference to the theories that interpret the persecution of Gypsies as the result of a public security policy, see M. Karpati, La politica fascista verso gli zingari in Italia, in M. Karpati (ed.), Zingari ieri e oggi, Rome, Centro Studi Zingari, 1993, pp. 59-64; M. Karpati, La politica fascista verso gli zingari in Italia, in "Lacio Drom," 1984, nos. 2-3, pp. 41-47; M. Karpati, Zingari ieri e oggi, in "Lacio Drom," 1993, pp. 39-68; regarding the hypothesis of arrests of gypsies in reference to a fascist racial policy, see G. Boursier, La persecuzione degli zingari nell'Italia fascista (The persecution of gypsies in fascist Italy), in "Studi storici," year XXXVII, 1996, no. 4, p. 1065. (Bravi, 2007, p. 45).

Interior, General Directorate of Public Security, General and Confidential Affairs Division, Section III, No. 31398, entitled "Gypsy Caravans" of August 8, 1926, addressed to Prefects, requesting "the purging of the national territory of the presence of gypsy caravans, whose danger to public safety and hygiene needs no reminder," and which also specifies that "it remains the responsibility of the border offices to reject gypsies in principle, even if they are in possession of valid documents."

It was in the following ten years that the so-called "gypsy problem" was reconfigured from an exclusively public safety issue to a racial science theory. "The idea that the internment of Roma in Italy took place simply for reasons of public safety, completely unrelated to eugenics, therefore appears rather simplistic" (Bravi, 2007, p. 37). The first phase of this overlap involved round-ups and internment measures initially targeting communities on the Istrian border and included in the telegraphic circular of the Administrative and Judicial Police Division, no. 45941, to the Chief of Police and the prefects of Trieste, Gorizia, Pola, Fiume, Zara, Bolzano, and Trento on December 6, 1937, which stipulated "that vagrants of certain or presumed Italian nationality be rounded up as quickly as possible and concentrated in the most suitable locations in each province to prevent their movement, adopting measures of confinement and subjecting them to strict control."

The following year, on July 14, 1938, the Manifesto of Race was published, which would form the ideological and scientific basis of the racial policy of Fascist Italy. It was inspired by theories of race classification and the link between hereditary physical and psychological traits and criminal behavior, and imposed a clear direction in the fight against any form of "alteration of the purely European physical and psychological characteristics of Italians."

The Roma and Sinti communities thus became the main target of punitive measures, driven both by categorization linked to racial contamination and by social order and state security concerns, with deportations at the border. On January 17, 1938, Arturo Bocchini, head of the fascist police, ordered all Istrian Roma to be counted and categorized, dividing them into those with non-dangerous criminal records, those with no criminal records and dangerous individuals, and dangerous individuals. With the circular of September 11, 1940, from the Ministry of the Interior, signed by police chief Arturo Bocchini and addressed to the prefects of the Kingdom and the police commissioner of Rome, internment became systematic: "Without prejudice to previous provisions regarding the rejection or expulsion of foreign gypsies, it is hereby ordered that those of certain or presumed Italian nationality still in circulation be rounded up as quickly as possible and concentrated under strict surveillance in the most suitable locations" (Cagna Ninchi, 2018, p.83).

Starting in 1938, all the gypsies of Istria, who had previously been registered in detail, were rounded up by the Italian police and deported to Sardinia, where they remained until the end of World War II. in 1942, it was the turn of those living in Slovenian territory under Italian occupation, who were deported to Tossicia in Abruzzo, where they remained confined until September 8, 1943 (Bravi, Bassoli, 2013).

The internment camps set up by this circular multiplied, starting with a former tobacco factory

near Bojano (province of Campobasso), where between 1940 and 1941, 58 Roma and Sinti from all over the country arrived, then transferred to the nearby town of Agnone, in the province of Isernia. The camps at Prignano sul Secchia, in the province of Modena, and Tossicia, in the province of Teramo, were added.
On May 14, 1942, in a confidential telegram, the Italian embassy in Berlin informed the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Popular Culture, "for their proper knowledge" ( ), of the "equating of Gypsies with Jews." After the armistice of September 8, 1943, Roma and Sinti were deported from Italy to other camps under the direct control of the Third Reich in Bolzano, Mauthausen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Natzweiler, and Ravensbruck.
Despite this equalization within the provisions of the racial laws, according to historian Luca Bravi, Roma and Sinti never represented an imminent and uncontrollable threat: "Gypsies had in fact long been relegated to the margins of society with little means of social advancement. It should therefore come as no surprise that the persecution of this group was certainly not a priority of fascist demographic policy" (Bravi, 2007, p. 46). They continued to be considered a danger in the "racial vision" that identified gypsies as carriers of psycho-moral and therefore social inferiority. This was because, at this stage in history, as in subsequent ones, they represented "an internal pocket of resistance," a tangible sign of the ineffectiveness of policies of expulsion, persecution, or forced assimilation, and therefore an alternative to the cultural model perceived as dominant (*Ibid.)*.
The historian's position is interesting in that he suggests a lens of analysis that places the primacy of educational dynamics in the measures that, starting from this historical phase, will follow over the decades, and which would explain why "racial research would be structured along a distinct path from that of legislation."
We quote it below:

> Governments said that they could never win by pursuing re-education, because the peculiar characteristics of the Roma's antisociality, idleness, sloth, love of orgies, impetuous anger, ferocity, and vanity, as Cesare Lombroso also pointed out, were genetic traits that could not be changed by any intervention. The failed attempt was interpreted as clear proof of the impossibility of civilizing this people. The time was ripe to support such a thesis on a scientific level, without being forced to bring down the house of cards of the dominant culture. (*Ibid.*).

The sometimes unspoken, sometimes overt aims of re-education and civilization and the consequent narrative of their failure, due to the immutability and antisociality of the Roma and Sinti linked to Lombroso's 'hereditary defect' with which the Roma and Sinti communities were publicly described, crystallized from this historical phase and persisted for years to come and, as we will see later, according to many positions across academia and activism, persist today.
As already mentioned, the discovery of the existence in Italy of concentration camps reserved for Roma and Sinti in the period 1940-1943 is recent, and only in the last few years have historians,

politicians, and activists made it the subject of specific investigation and an occasion for commemoration. This process of reappropriating historical memory, shared only at the family level or completely hidden, is of great importance in this discussion because it is one of the few examples in the Italian context, perhaps the only one to date, in which the work of historians, the involvement of communities through Roma and Sinti organizations, and finally, gradually, of institutions, has taken place in a concurrent and equal manner.
In the next section, we will look at some examples of this harmonious planning in an effort to raise awareness and disseminate information, which has seen the creation of platforms for sharing historical memory that are important both, of course, from the point of view of the historical reconstruction of the Porrajmos, and for the history of the civil rights movement of the Roma and Sinti in the strict sense, which recognizes some of the leading figures of the partisan war as founding fathers.

2.2 The Roma and Sinti resistance

The recognition of the genocide of Roma and Sinti in Italy during Nazi-Fascism is one of the cornerstones of the civil rights movement of Roma and Sinti in Italy, as in many other European countries.
The process of awareness and historical research in Italy is recent, as has been repeatedly emphasized, but to date, through the collection of memories and testimonies and comparison with historiography, an important starting point for future reflection has been handed down to the younger generations. The number of Roma and Sinti who participated in the resistance war is still unknown. Some stories have been reconstructed by cross-referencing testimonies with documents related to the National Liberation Committee concerning partisan actions, most of which are preserved in the memories of the families of the protagonists.
Here is a brief account of the stories of some heroic figures collected in memory projects and publications.
by activists and historians in recent years, above all through the *Memors* project of the Fossoli Foundation, funded by the European Union for the year 2012-2013 as part of the EACEA program, thanks to which "The first virtual museum of the Porrajmos in Italy. The persecution of Roma and Sinti during the Fascist period', called *porrajmos.it*, and the publication *Attraversare Auschwitz Storie di rom e sinti: Identity, memories, antiziganism,* produced as part of the project 'Promotion and dissemination of the culture of the Roma, Sinti and Caminanti', funded under the PON Inclusion program with the contribution of the European Social Fund 2014-2020.
The first testimony is that of Amilcare Debar, whose story was collected by Giovanna Boursier in 1998 in an interview in Italian for the USC Shoah Foundation's visual history archive.
Amilcare Debar was born in Frossasco, in the Turin area, on June 16, 1927. He grew up in an orphanage and had no ties to his family of origin. At the age of 17, he joined the partisan struggle for the 48th Garibaldi Brigade in the 'Dante Nanni' battalion, first as a courier and then in partisan actions in the Langhe under the nom de guerre 'Corsaro' until the liberation of Turin.

He met a very young Sandro Pertini, also a partisan, who would become President of the Italian Republic from 1978 to 1985. After the war, he was offered a position in the police force, and in this role he met a Sinti family with the same surname as him, through whom he reconstructed his origins and chose to reunite with them because, as he said in the interview mentioned above, "As a policeman, I would certainly have had to arrest gypsies, and then I would have had to arrest my own brother." In the early 1980s, Pertini awarded him the "Certificate of Patriotism" – the famous Alexander patent – which is still the only certificate issued to a Roma or Sinti partisan. In the interview mentioned above, Debar talks about shootings and prisoners on both sides, and when asked about his opinion of his opponents, he replies with extreme lucidity: "To be honest, they were guys like us"[4] .

The second story we have decided to mention is that of the "Lions of Breda Solini," composed solely of Italian Sinti who escaped from the concentration camp in Prignano sul Secchia (MO), where they had been deported in September 1940. These Sinti belonged to families such as the De Bar, Truzzi, and Triberti, who were involved in traveling entertainment, performing in town squares during the day and participating in partisan activities at night.

Finally, we mention the partisans known today as "the martyrs of Vicenza," ten partisans, including four Sinti from the Vicenza area, who, on November 9, 1944, blew up the railway near the Ponte dei

Marmi, to prevent the passage of a weapons shipment that would have supplied the Nazis. The Sinti partisans worked in traveling shows: Walter Vampa Catter, Ercole Lino Festini, Silvio Paina, and Renato Mastini. They were all arrested and, after days of torture, shot near the bridge they had sabotaged. The story of the martyrs of Vicenza lives on thanks to the testimony of Vincenzina Erasma Pevarello, who searched for days for her partner Renato Mastini and the others who had been arrested, until she discovered of their deaths. The massacre is known as the Ponte dei Marmi Massacre, and a memorial stone in the city of Vicenza commemorates the Ten Fallen.

In conclusion to this overview of the Roma and Sinti resistance in Italy, we would like to give an example that is apparently opposite but symptomatic of the relational dynamics with the majority non-Roma and non-Sint n community, which we believe is extremely important as evidence of the "cultural myopia" surrounding the stigma of "asociality."

The precursors of contemporary anti-Gypsyism, represented by the persecution and internment described above, present us with attitudes that are completely opposite to antisocial dynamics. On the contrary, they seem to us to be entirely aimed at active participation which, as we will try to demonstrate, will entirely characterize the dynamics of negotiation between Roma and Sinti and non-Roma and non-Sinti in Italy.

In that same phase of confrontation and fratricidal conflict between the armed forces of fascist Italy and the partisan militias, Roma and Sinti were present on both sides. The presence of Roma and Sinti within the regular fringes of the regime is poorly documented, or perhaps even absent,

[4]https://www.audible.it/podcast/Uno-di-noi-Rom-e-Sinti-nella-Resistenza/B0FHQVCVJF?source_code=ASSGB149080119000H&share_location=pdp

for various reasons that are difficult to explore in depth here. Certainly, the Italian reluctance to truly and objectively examine the historical truth of the twenty years of fascism and the war years, and to hold a lively debate on the reasons for joining fascism and the legacy of this undeniable participation at all levels of Italian society, has had an impact. Another decisive factor is undoubtedly the peculiar situation of the Roma in southern Italy, whose gradual 'disappearance' from the public sphere of identity recognition has been explained by anthropology and the history of Roma groups. However, the documentary Gitanistan by Pierluigi De Donno and Claudio Giagnotti, about Roma families in Salento, offers us invaluable testimony about southern Italy in the private sphere. We will refer to this document several times in the course of our discussion, but at this stage we need it for the testimony of Giuseppe Rinaldi, Giagnotti's maternal grandfather, a merchant and horse breeder, who enlisted in the royal army under fascist control and took part in the 1926 campaign to reconquer Cyrenaica, now Libya. For Rinaldi, as for many other young Italians of his age, enlistment in the army, sometimes the result of compulsory conscription, did not constitute adherence to fascist ideals, but rather patriotic involvement at a time when, for the vast majority of young Italians, patriotic irredentism was a pervasive and dominant ideology. According to his heirs, upon his return, Rinaldi processed his experience of the Libyan campaign in many ways, both in terms of his disappointment with fascism itself, which for many had unfortunately initially represented a new and coherent vision of the state and even of democracy, but above all in terms of the treatment reserved for him and his family as 'gypsies' upon his return. His sacrifice for his country (Rinaldi was wounded and risked his life as a soldier) in the name of Italian belonging was not recognized in any way by the majority society, for whom he would remain 'the gypsy' for the rest of his life.

2.3 Continuity in the post-war period

In the post-war period, the disorderly and traumatic return of communities, in some cases to their previous territories, in other cases to rebuild family networks, is poorly documented and belongs to oral history.
However, it is possible to reconstruct in detail the main institutional interlocutor of the Roma and Sinti communities during this period: the Catholic Church. The analysis of this relationship is very important for the development of subsequent policies and dynamics that influenced the communities *themselves* and the institutional policies aimed at them, but above all, they were decisive in the formation of community representatives in the years to come.
The evangelization of groups defined at the time by the all-encompassing term "nomads" (which we will use in this part of the discussion) predates the phase analyzed above of the twenty years of Fascism, dating back in fact to the 1920s and the group of Catholic women UDCI around the figure of Agar Pastorello.
The nun initially came into contact with several families in the Padua area and later in the rest of northern and central Italy through unstructured initiatives. Her diary, *Oasi di Carovane*, offers us an interesting testimony of the groups at that time and the dynamics of the mobility of families

in northeastern Italy.
The first increasingly organized initiatives date back to the post-war period and the work of Father Dino Torreggiani in the Treviso area with traveling show nomads. From 1958, this work was directed by the Opera Assistenza Spirituale ai Nomadi in Italia (OASNI).
The figure of Father Torreggiani is certainly controversial, above all for his ambiguous position with regard to fascism (Piasere, 2018, p. 55). From the priest's writings, we know that he was aware of the internment in concentration camps, probably from the stories of the families he came into contact with every day during his evangelizing mission. However, he never promoted the dissemination of this reality and the crimes suffered. His pastoral ideas, on the other hand, were not only a source of teaching for subsequent generations of clergy, but also contributed to establishing the categories and imagery that would form the basis for subsequent categorizations.
Father Torreggiani's Manual for Religious Assistance to Nomads in Italy, published in 1961, includes the "ethnic and psychological characteristics of Italian nomads" in addition to the general and specific rules that should apply to their spiritual and social assistance. He was the first to divide the users into three categories: "equestrian circus artists," "traveling entertainers," and "gypsies," counting a total of about 40,000. This distinction remained in the pastoral care of the Italian Church for years (*Ibid.*).
Father Torreggiani's work is also important because it was a source of inspiration for the socio-legal process that led to the establishment of rest camps in the 1980s. Leonardo Piasere, in his book *La Chiesa Nomade* (The Nomadic Church), quotes an internal document linked to a speech given by the priest at the Institute of the Servants of the Church in Reggio Emilia, which describes the rules for managing a rest camp:

> The San Giuseppe voluntary "camp" had to be: 1) voluntary, free, private, "entirely dependent on the Catholic Mission"; 2) governed by precise rules of conduct within the camp and 3) for conduct outside the camp; 4) managed by a single authority: the Director of the Mission (who could also be assisted by the police); 5) no "gagi" of bad character could enter the camp, nor could anyone leave at night. The organizational chart included the Director of the Catholic Mission, a manager appointed by the former, and the "Council of Fathers," which, among other things, would elect those in charge of services (cleaning, etc.) (in Piasere, 2018, p. 64).

As we shall see, this organization based on control and regulation of entry is not so dissimilar from the current system that regulates the management of camps entrusted to service cooperatives and quite clearly implies that "nomads" are considered "poor, abandoned, and needy."
These early examples of organizational directives mark the beginnings of the Catholic Church's "mediation" role between "nomads" and society, which OASNI represents at a stage where "if the

state appears on the horizon, it is still far away" (Ibid., p. 63). However, it was in the 1960s that a system emerged in which the mediating role of Catholic institutions "became a paradigm" through the figure of Father Bruno Nicolini and Opera Nomadi.

Father Bruno Nicolini carried out his pastoral work in the province of Bolzano, where he developed the guidelines linked to the 'social assistance' of Father Torreggiani's Manual and, in 1965, the year of the famous meeting between the nomads and Pope Paul VI, founded which became Opera Nomadi (ON), recognized as a moral entity by the Italian state in 1970, which focused primarily on the education of "nomads" and "gypsies" and initiated the construction of nomad camps (Ibid., p. 83). From the beginning of his pastoral work in Bolzano, Father Nicolini's work was linked to that of the educationalist Mirella Karpati (1923-2017), with whom he founded the magazine *Lacio drom* and then the Centro Studi Zingari (Gypsy Study Center) in Rome. According to Leonardo Piasere, "with Father Nicolini, we have the 'civilizing' side that apparently takes precedence over the 'evangelizing' side, at least it is given precedence in the rhetoric prevailing in the Opera Nomadi under his leadership" (*Ibid.)*. However, "religious and civil elevation," that is, the processes of evangelization and citizenship, had sociological and psychological obstacles among the gypsies, according to Father Nicolini (Ibid., p. 102).

From Piasere's analysis of the religious man's texts, diaries, and public speeches, the conclusion is that his views were based on strongly anti-Gypsy assumptions about the communities he came into contact with every day. In fact, Gypsies would not have "evolved" due to psychological factors such as "the instability of character of the Gypsy ethotype." Father Nicolini also cited and identified with the racist research of German physician Hermann Arnold and Robert Ritter, two of the Nazi doctors involved in the genocide of the Gypsies during World War II, such as the thesis of psychological instability as hereditary (*Ibid.*).

It therefore seems clear, Piasere continues, "how in the Italian Catholic Church racist theories about gypsies flanked theological reforms and the drive for social advancement for a period, without highlighting the contradictions that this entailed" (Ibid., p. 102).

It is important to clarify that the theories of re-education and civilization that arose from the ashes of race theory in previous years, as had happened with race theory itself, were accompanied from the outset by constant debate in the social and human sciences and in Italian academic circles, without these theories being fundamentally questioned in any way. This debate led, for example, to the establishment of Lacio Drom schools under ministerial mandate. Before delving into the analysis of this experience, which was decisive for all those involved at the time and, from many points of view, founded the Roma and Sinti civil rights movement, we would like to briefly describe another phase of encounters and collaboration between religious figures and communities in which the evangelizing and civilizing-educational mission was replaced by a pastoral approach based on participation and encounter.

A new generation of religious figures was formed around the figure of Father Mario Riboldi, a priest in a small village in the diocese of Milan who, in 1971, began to live permanently among the Roma and Sinti and who "indicated that living with the gypsies, learning their language and praying in their language, daily witness, invisibility or low visibility, was the main path for pastoral

care" (Ibid., p. 119).
Father Riboldi's experience took place during a contradictory period: on the one hand, there were objectives of segregation and sedentarization, with the revival of anti-vagrancy laws that allowed local authorities to expel "nomads" and prevent them from entering and staying in certain areas by means of widespread signs bearing the words 'No stopping for vagrants'. On the other hand, there was a circular from the Ministry of the Interior, No. 17/73 of October 11, 1973, which was sent to all mayors in Italy asking them to abolish parking bans and to encourage registration, work permits, parking areas, and schooling for children.
This phase coincided with the establishment of the first parking areas in the Milan area, where Father Riboldi worked, as well as in other Italian cities such as Rome, Florence, Bologna, and Turin. In Turin in particular, the Italian Association of Gypsies Today (AIZO) was founded during these years by Carla Osella, also inspired by Catholicism in the socio-educational field. Both Opera Nomadi and AIZO are still active today, after more than thirty years in which they have been the main interlocutors of the institutions in defining policies towards the communities, as we will see in the second part of this report, in which we will focus on the history of the civil rights movement, examining the structure and choices of these organizations in greater depth.
The example of Father Mario Riboldi was followed by many other younger religious men and women "trained in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, as well as in the ideas of the youth movements of 1968 and the worker priests," who challenged "pre-conciliar ecclesial practices, going so far as to propose innovative pastoral and theological reflections" (Ibid., p. 94). Among these, we mention above all Father Alberto Garau, who worked among the Roma of Cosenza in Calabria in the early 1980s. Activist Stefania Bevilacqua particularly remembers this figure's drive towards a sense of pride in Roma identity and culture and tradition, in stark contrast to the general feeling of rejection and self- shame that Bevilacqua[5] perceived at school and in other non-Roma contexts.
The OASNI, mentioned above, came under the leadership of the CEI and the Episcopal Commission for Migration and Tourism (CEMiT), then disappeared and was replaced by the National Office for the Pastoral Care of Roma and Sinti (UNPRES) within the Migrantes Foundation, founded in 1987. The term 'nomads' disappeared from Catholic nomenclature, with the Foundation establishing the National Office for Circus Performers, Amusement Park Workers and Street Artists in addition to the aforementioned office.
The choice of the generation of young religious figures starting with Father Riboldi gave rise to a network of practitioners of "mimetic sharing" that remained active until the 2010s. It was supported by Father Piero Gabella, director of OASNI and then UNIPRES in 1984, during which time "careful and informed denunciations against the rising antigypsyism in Italian society" (*Ibid.*). In 1989, in a special issue of the magazine *Rom,* an article probably attributable to Sister Giuseppina Scaramuzzetti launched "a precise attack on the policy of setting up 'nomad camps' that the Italian regions had been pursuing for some years under the impetus of Opera Nomadi"

[5] Ethnographic interview, 08.07.25.

(*Ibid)*.

As already mentioned, the experience of Opera Nomadi is definitely, for better or worse, the most transformative experience of recent years. The 'camping sites', which we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, were and still are a uniquely Italian phenomenon, arising precisely from the alliance between the Catholic Church and the Italian state in their relationship with the Roma and Sinti communities. Another equally important experience, albeit more limited in scope, which also originated with Opera Nomadi, is that of the Lacio Drom classes.

On September 15, 1965, with an agreement between the Ministry of Education, the Institute of Pedagogy of the University of Padua, and Opera Nomadi, the latter was assigned primacy in the field of education and training of minors from Roma and Sinti families. Among its activities, the most important was the establishment of 11 special Lacio Drom classes ("good journey" in the Romani language). Launched a few years earlier on an experimental basis outside schools, by 1972 there were 60 classes spread across major Italian cities from north to south. The agreement also provided for specialization courses for teachers for "scientific study of the problem of the education of gypsy children."

The analysis of the work and impact of the Lacio Drom classes is very recent. Among the texts and research produced, we mention the project "Stories in history: learning together," which, with a team of historians, researchers, and educators, reconstructs "the stages of the schooling of Sinti and Roma in Italy and describes, through the voices of the protagonists, the inclusion and exclusion, the positive educational processes and the practices of keeping these communities at a distance"[6] and the publication by Eva Rizzin and Luca Bravi *Lacio drom. Storia delle "classi speciali per zingari" (*Lacio Drom. History of the "*special classes for gypsies")*, which describes the experience from the point of view of the history of schooling in Italy. The publication analyzes the documentation produced in relation to the Lacio Drom classes, including the bulletin also entitled Lacio drom[7] , published from 1965 to 1999, first by the Opera Assistenza Nomadi di Bolzano, then by Opera Nomadi, and finally by the Centro Studi Zingari, established in close collaboration with Opera Nomadi in 1970.

The magazine publishes articles related to school experiences, but also in-depth and historical articles related to the humanities, experiences of social intervention related to 'pastoral care for gypsies', and even simple exchanges of information. For decades to come, it represented "the main source of dissemination of research, objectives, and actions aimed at the Roma and Sinti context in Italy" (Bravi, Rizzin, 2024, p.10).

The Lacio Drom classes formally ended in 1977 following Law No. 517 of August 4, which introduced the concept of school integration, although the year before, in a letter to school

[6] https://storie-nella-storia.it/

[7] "While the bimonthly magazine Lacio drom was primarily a vehicle for reflection and theoretical dissemination, other more strictly educational tools were equally important in school practice: there were student notebooks called Baro Jag (big fire), which recorded classroom activities; there was a newspaper for special classes for 'gypsies' entitled 'Ticno Lil' (small document), which reported reflections made by teachers/experts/educators based on what was produced in the classroom; finally, there was a specific 'Ticno Lil Maestri' which served as an educational link between the teachers working in those classes." (Bravi, Rizzin 2024: 9).

superintendents and councilors of the municipalities and regions involved, the National Nomad Organization itself "suggested the abolition of special schools for gypsies and their integration into mainstream schools." In reality, mono-ethnic classes continued to exist until the 1980s, and examples of school segregation of the same nature continue to this day in Pescara and Reggio Calabria. In the aforementioned analysis by Rizzin and Bravi, three elements of the "construction of 'Lacio drom' classes" are distinguished: the administrative choice, the objectives of "gypsy pedagogy," and the work of teachers in the classroom (*Ibid.)*.

With regard to the administrative choice to create a specific schooling path for Roma and Sinti, the analysis reveals a response to the urgent need to rapidly increase the schooling of children from these communities, which, however, translates into "the legislative framework (as well as the collective imagination) of special schools for people with disabilities, thus creating a public image of problematic diversity" (Ibid., p. 12).

The pedagogical point of view and its translation into special classroom teaching are equally interesting. Not only do the educational objectives, focusing on basic skills—reading, writing, and arithmetic—neglect socialization, thus the initial premise of encouraging the integration of children, to the extent that they achieve the opposite, namely, full-fledged spatial and relational segregation in schools; but the theoretical and pedagogical framework of these educational objectives demonstrates, in a way that is not so much latent as quite manifest, the educational consideration of the 'gypsy family' as incapable of playing an adequate role in the proper socialization of their children" (*Ibid.*). It is therefore easy to see how, decades later, the beliefs about the 'asocial' nature of the Roma and Sinti, then known as 'nomads' and 'gypsies', and their reluctance to adapt, also referred to in a polysemous sense as 'resistance', have returned. This is particularly evident when rereading the testimonies contained in the aforementioned *Storia nelle Storie-formarsi insieme (History in Stories-learning together*) platform.

Here are some testimonies taken from the video of interviews of the same name, produced and published on major video platforms[8] .

> For us here in Prato, when I was 14, there were special Laciodrom classes, and they put all the children of all ages, from six to twelve or thirteen, together in one class, and we didn't learn anything.
>
> Sometimes they were in separate buildings, sometimes they were even held in the same schools outside of school hours, in the afternoon when there were no normal pupils, because they didn't think that we Sinti children could be like other children, i.e. go to first grade, learn to read, go to second, third, and fourth grade, normally, because they thought we were less intelligent [...] We didn't learn anything there because they didn't teach us anything. It wasn't that we didn't want to, there was nothing to learn. [...] There was a lot of racism. I have a very clear memory of this: at school, they asked us to draw our house on a

[8] https://storie-nella-storia.it/interviste/

piece of paper, so everyone drew a house with bricks, a roof, and a chimney. but I simply drew my home, which is a trailer, and when I had to show it to the class, I remember my classmates' wide eyes because they didn't understand.

Sometimes they were separate buildings, sometimes even sitting in the same schools outside of school hours, but rather in the afternoon when there were no normal pupils, that is, they didn't think that we Sinti children could be like other children, that is, go to first grade, learn to read, go to second, third, fourth grade, normal, because they thought we had smaller brains.

You arrive at the camp and you're home, because you know you're protected, let's say, from the world elsewhere, but it's your downfall because when you walk home, you have to take a longer route, you have to wait for your classmates to leave, you have to get dropped off at a different building first and take a different route, which means always feeling like you're at the post office, at the Esselunga supermarket, at school, everywhere, comments about that camp, thinking that others pay for things for you and that you are a freeloader who lives off others, when that is absolutely not the case. But the camp also takes you away from reality, because you are put in a dark place, because it was dark, hidden, far from the world.

It is clear, even from these brief excerpts, that the recurring themes in the review of Lacio drom by the students themselves, now adults, are linked to the paradigm of educational poverty and segregation in schools and housing. Memories of school discrimination are etched in the minds of many Roma and Sinti across all age groups and regions, and this is one of the main focuses of activism, as we will see in the second part, both at the local level and as a pillar of the National Strategy.

We conclude this in-depth analysis of the 1980s, both chronologically and to clarify the institutional importance of the experiences described, by mentioning the laws that were passed at the regional level in compliance with the Circular of the Ministry of the Interior No. 1518 of July 15, 1985, which asked local authorities to provide 'an adequate response to the basic needs of nomadic populations, which at the same time respects the culture and traditions of life, which are extremely diverse, of the various ethnic groups that are part of nomadism'. These laws address the same issues, both in terms of language and content, that characterized the previous phases.

Lazio Regional Law No. 82 of May 24, 1985, entitled "Regulations in favour of the Roma," still in force, sets as its priority "avoiding impediments to the right to nomadism and stopping" (Art. 1). It is the first in a series of regional laws that dictate the lines of local intervention for the following decades. This was followed by Veneto Regional Law No. 41 of August 16, 1984, "Interventions to protect the culture of the Roma" (repealed by Regional Law No. 54/1989, "Interventions to protect the culture of the Roma and Sinti," which was in turn repealed in 2016).

This was followed by Friuli-Venezia Giulia Regional Law No. 11 of March 14, 1988, "Regulations for the protection of Roma culture within the territory of the autonomous region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia," and Sardinian Regional Law No. 9 of March 14, 1988, entitled "Protection of the ethnicity and culture of nomads."

These initial measures were followed in 1988 by the enactment of Regional Law 47/1988 (repealed by Regional Law 11/2015) "Regulations for the protection of nomadic minorities in Emilia Romagna," through which the Region "regulates and contributes to the concrete implementation of the right of nomads to transit and stopover, and to facilitate their integration into the regional community," and of Tuscany of March 12, 1988, Law No. 17, "Interventions for the protection of the ETNIA-ROM." (Repealed by Regional Law No. 73/1995); Lombardy Regional Law No. 77 of December 22, 1989, "Action for the protection of populations belonging to traditionally nomadic and semi-nomadic ethnic groups" (Repealed by Art. 14, paragraph 1, letter b) of Regional Law No. 20 of July 8, 2015, Simplification Law 2015.

The in-depth analysis of the contents of the research "Contemporary antigypsyism in Italian local regulatory provisions" carried out as part of the project "Countering antigypsyism: a cultural journey between memory and current events" in agreement between the Presidency of the Council of Ministers - Department for Equal Opportunities - UNAR and Formez PA[9] , focuses on the terms used in the laws of the 1980s and 1990s to refer to beneficiaries: "gypsies/nomads/Roma and Sinti") and on the legal principle defined in the texts as "the right to nomadism" (e.g., Picker 2015).

As highlighted by studies on the categorization of Roma and Sinti, the umbrella category "gypsies/Roma" is "the result of a complex dialectic between self- and hetero-ascriptions which, under presumed common origins and socio-cultural characteristics, groups together a super-diverse and territorially dispersed population" (Pontrandolfo, Solimene, 2018, p. 13). In addition to being categorized homogeneously, these groups, which are in reality quite heterogeneous, are also categorized as "nomadic," and consequently "exotic, uncivilized, backward, primitive, traditional, placeless, uprooted, and in constant mobility, [...] as a threat to the creation of external and internal borders of the EU and its member states" (*Ibid.).*

Thus, "gypsies/Roma" are interpreted as outsiders to the body of the nation, thought to
they may threaten the integrity of cultural values and social assets. In Italy, the derogatory overlap between "gypsies," "Roma," and "nomads" and the overlap between them has greatly influenced local policies toward these populations, which in fact have extremely different histories, different legal statuses, and live in highly variable social, economic, and cultural conditions.

The recurring reference in regional laws to the "right to nomadism" therefore appears highly contradictory: first of all, it ends up defining as nomadism what are rather historically and locally situated strategies (Piasere 2004), sometimes economic subsistence strategies, other times strategies linked to a precarious personal and legal condition, escapes from persecution or war

[9] https://sites.dsu.univr.it/creaa/progetto/antiziganismo-contemporaneo-nei-dispositivi-normativi-locali-italiani/

or difficult economic situations (think of immigration to Italy from the territories of the former Yugoslavia following the wars in the Balkans, or the arrival of Romanian Roma following the collapse of the Ceaușescu regime, movements that were extremely important for Italy, as we shall see). Furthermore, the aim is to protect nomadism as an aspect of the cultural identity of Roma and Sinti, starting from an attribution of nomadism that is detached from any historical and social consideration of Roma and Sinti groups. Presumed nomadism is considered, in fact, to be the main socio-cultural identity trait, incorporated into the identity of the 'Roma', who are considered a homogeneous group, without noting that around 80% of Roma and Sinti have not practiced any form of itinerancy for some time (sometimes for centuries) (Piasere 2004), and that those who practice forms of itinerancy do so for reasons of economic subsistence that do not undermine, but rather may strengthen, their roots in certain territories (Pontrandolfo and Trevisan 2009). Therefore, what the laws aim to protect is not in fact 'real' nomadism, in the forms and ways in which it is practiced as a lifestyle linked to itinerant work activities, but a supposed, imagined nomadism crystallized in the construction operated from outside by different forces and motivations that drive legislators.

The laws of the 1980s, therefore, effectively provide legal legitimacy to the 'camp system' (ERRC 2000), which was already widespread throughout the peninsula in various informal, unauthorised forms. The 'camp system' in Italy, which originated in some cities in northern Italy as early as the 1970s, is the result of a 'sedentarisation policy set out in three circulars from the Ministry of the Interior, dated 1973, 1982 and 1985 respectively, addressed to local authorities, which stipulated the need for municipalities to abolish the ban on 'nomadic' families stopping' (Picker 2015: 76). Scholars agree that, during this process, camps are viewed positively as a tool for integration because they allow the municipalities concerned to control the population living there, maintain acceptable levels of hygiene and sanitation, and at the same time carry out the necessary educational and vocational training activities for young people. The laws of the 1980s therefore reflect this reinterpretation of supposed nomadism, translated into public housing policies consisting of the authorization and management of stays in caravans or mobile homes, effectively leading to a recategorization as 'nomads' of those who were no longer nomadic or even those who had never been nomadic, considering how Roma groups from areas where they had led a sedentary life residing in permanent dwellings were being channelled into camps. Therefore, the 'nomadism' envisaged by regional regulations is rather a sedentary lifestyle, characterized by 'residential segregation' (Di Noia 2016).

The laws analyzed therefore set a broad spending ceiling, and the appropriations are mainly aimed at the creation, management, and maintenance of rest and transit areas, which are always entrusted to municipalities, even from a strictly administrative point of view. We will return to the subject of rest areas, transit areas, and nomad camps later on, when the phenomenon of residential segregation, exclusion, and antigypsyism that the camps constituted and continue to constitute enters the European debate. However, in order to fully understand the triumph of the camp system and its characteristics as one of the main mechanisms of antigypsyism, it is necessary to focus on the configuration of this system and its history in the 1990s and early

2000s.

3. Contemporary manifestations (1990-2008)

In this part of the discussion, we will analyze a twenty-year period characterized by violent waves of antigypsyism unfolding in the context of institutional policies that increasingly regulated the daily life of Roma and Sinti communities to the point of becoming openly discriminatory.
From a demographic point of view, we witnessed the arrival in Italy of Roma from the former Yugoslavia, which was falling apart, who were entitled to recognition of their legal status as 'refugees'. The presence of the first groups to arrive was legalized with residence permits under the Martelli Law 39/1990, a measure aimed at 'regularizing non-EU citizens and stateless persons already present in the territory of the State' (Law 39/1990, Art. 1, paragraph 1) and through the provisions of Law 390 of 24/9/1992 'Extraordinary humanitarian measures in favor of displaced persons from the republics that arose in the territories of the former Yugoslavia', promulgated in response to the migration emergency linked to the wars in the Balkans.
This phenomenon amplified "the camp system" that had been initiated in previous years, definitively shaping its structure for years to come.
The 1990s ended with national provisions on reception management, with measures related to the refugee emergency for Roma from the former Yugoslavia, opting for reception and support measures at the end of the period of stay linked to refugee status, refugee or stateless status based on gradual integration into work and housing, and with the establishment of policies aimed at the Sinti for the management of rest areas, surveillance and health intervention, and efforts for school integration.

3.1 Waves of anti-Gypsyism

In the early 1990s, a circular from the Ministry of the Interior, No. 4/91, entitled "Settlements of nomads, gypsies, and non-EU citizens. Surveillance and control activities" dated January 18, 1991, which required local authorities to monitor and control "aggressive begging, palmistry, and, in the worst cases, crimes against property and drug-related offenses."
At this stage, with regional laws multiplying in the wake of those observed previously, driven by the attempt to regulate stopping from an institutional point of view, it is always through the categorization of the large melting pot of "nomads, gypsies, and non-EU citizens" that institutions deploy the most discriminatory policies.
The decade is marked by strong contradictions from a legislative point of view, but also from a social point of view, as relations between the majority community and the Roma and Sinti communities become increasingly strained.
The story is one of an emergency that various voluntary associations and the administration are struggling to deal with due to the fragmentation of the groups (with different traditions, customs, and religions) and their size, but also from a legislative point of view due to the different regularization procedures adopted for the various groups.

In this crucial historical phase of contradictions, we cite one of the most violent racial hate crimes in the history of the Roma and Sinti communities in Italy, which, in our opinion, contains many of the traits that will be attributed to antigypsyism proper in the years to come.

On December 10, 1990, the criminal group defined by the media as the "Banda della Uno Bianca" (White Uno Gang), composed of

agents of the State Police and led by brothers Roberto, Fabio, and Alberto Savi—the first two serving with the Bologna and Rimini police forces—attacked the S. Caterina di Quarto nomad camp in Bologna, inhabited mainly by Roma from the former Yugoslavia, leaving nine people wounded. On December 23, they attacked the camp inhabited mainly by Sinti in Via Gobetti. Patrizia Della Santina, a 34-year-old mother of four, and Rodolfo Bellinati, only 27, were killed. Sara Bellinati, a six-year-old girl, and Lirije Llukaci, 34, originally from present-day Kosovo, were injured.

It is extremely complex to examine these crimes, which have a long history of legal proceedings, in depth in this discussion, but we would like to point out some specific details that are useful in this reconstruction. Witnesses to the shooting, heard at the Bologna Police Headquarters as eyewitnesses, recognized Roberto Savi as the perpetrator of the crime in the days following the shooting, but, as they stated immediately and in the years that followed, they were not believed "because they were gypsies." So much so that the gang committed countless crimes and robberies over the next eight years before being identified and arrested. This attitude on the part of the police, given that there is currently no clear evidence of police officers covering up for colleagues who were engaging in criminal behaviour, clearly demonstrates all the theories expressed above regarding the underlying sentiment of refusal to consider Roma and Sinti as men and citizens with a right to testify, with credibility given by their physical presence in a given place, as if their eyes and bodies were not enough to be considered trustworthy. Another interesting point in this episode is how, from the point of view of the municipal and regional administration, it was openly 'the events of the Uno Bianca' that led to the setting up of a macro area in Via Erbosa, granted on an emergency and temporary basis to the families previously settled in Via Gobetti. After twenty-five years of emergency and temporary measures, the macro area, the nomad camp in Via Erbosa, has recently been 'overcome' through the housing of most of the families and the construction of two public micro-areas for those who were not willing to move into apartments. There have been countless episodes of violence and attacks against the Bologna parking areas since then, with cries of "let's make them end up like the Uno Bianca".

It is also in this decade that violent institutional antigypsyism practices have developed and crystallized, such as the removal of Roma and Sinti children from their families by child protection services.

The research: *Amputated families. The adoption of minors from the perspective of the Roma* by Carlotta Saletti Salza (2014), conducted in seven of the twenty-eight Italian Juvenile Courts, shows that from 1985 to 2005, 258 Roma and Sinti minors were declared adoptable, based on the provisions on national adoptions. 258 Roma and Sinti minors were declared adoptable, of whom about 60% were aged between 0 and 4, and 1.85% were Roma of foreign nationality. Roma

children given up for adoption sometimes represent 10-12% of the total, with the Roma and Sinti minority accounting for 0.2% of the total Italian population. Similar findings were reported in research conducted at the Juvenile Court of Rome, which has jurisdiction over the entire Lazio region, by Angela Tullio Cataldo for Associazione 21Luglio, which found that 11% of minors in the region are Roma, even though the Roma and Sinti communities account for only 0.35% of the population. Ninety-two percent live in official 'nomad camps' built by municipal authorities or otherwise tolerated and therefore known.
These data reveal 'the application of the old Enlightenment stereotype that Roma families are incapable of educating their children and, in fact, most often give birth to them in an uncontrolled manner precisely in order to exploit and mistreat them' (Piasere, 2015, p. 67).
Based on the same time period, Sabrina Tosi Cambini's research contained in *La zingara rapitrice (The Gypsy Kidnapper)* notes that between 1986 and 2007, there were 29 reports of child abductions by "gypsies" (the figure is already small in itself, given that in the five-year period 2001-2005 alone, the total number of reports of missing children in Italy amounted to 1,653). Of these 29 reports, 23 were not pursued and only 6 led to criminal proceedings, which in turn resulted in 4 acquittals, 2 convictions for 'attempted abduction' and no convictions for 'abduction'.
The criminalizing projection underlying the stereotype of the 'gypsy who steals children', which has been alive in Italy since time immemorial, is the same one on which the stigma of educational incapacity on the part of Roma and Sinti families is based. These stereotypes recur cyclically in public discourse, depending on current events and the political use made of them, but they are constantly fueled by the same assumptions of "inferiority" that fueled the racial theories of the 1920s.
This historical phase ended with the aforementioned Law 482/99 on linguistic minorities, which excludes Roma and Sinti on the basis of the principle of territoriality. They are not recognized by the Italian state in their linguistic and cultural specificity and never will be, at least formally, to this day.

3.2 The country of camps

The 2000s began with the 'Campland' scandal, following the report by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) entitled *Campland: Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy,* which brought to the forefront of European debate the housing and racial segregation suffered by some communities throughout the peninsula.
The report describes the poor conditions in authorized camps and the recurring evictions of illegal ones, with testimonies of violence, threats, torture, and abuse suffered at the hands of the police. The country is swept by waves of legalized and generalized violence perpetuated by the very forces responsible for defending citizens, which translates into the legitimization of acts of racial hatred and vigilante justice. On October 30, 2007, Giovanna Reggiani was attacked in Rome, in the Tor di Quinto area in northern Rome. The woman was raped and beaten in a shack

near the now almost abandoned Tor di Quinto nomad camp and then thrown to her death on an embankment. Her body was found thanks to the testimony of a Roma woman from the camp who alerted the emergency services. The same woman identified Nicolae Romulus Mailat, a 24-year-old Romanian citizen who had arrived at the camp a few months earlier, as the perpetrator. He was found guilty in court and sentenced to life imprisonment as the sole perpetrator.

The media constructed a narrative around the case that focused heavily on the nationality of the victim and her alleged attacker, while political forces exploited the case to fuel a campaign in which security became a priority across the political spectrum. "A chain reaction is triggered, leading to evictions, raids, and the wholesale destruction of Roma camps in Rome along the banks of the Aniene River, in the Nomentana, Trionfale, and Eur areas, and then also in Florence, Salerno, Lecce, Turin, and Bologna, within a few hours"[10] . In the months that followed, and after the victory of the right-wing coalition in the 2008 general election, attacks on Romanian citizens and Roma camps multiplied throughout the peninsula.

In May of the same year, the episode remembered as the Ponticelli *pogrom*, in the eastern suburbs of Naples, forced the Roma in the neighbourhood to flee following an attack with sticks, iron bars, gasoline cans, and Molotov cocktails by an angry crowd against a girl from the camp accused of wanting to kidnap a child from the neighbourhood.

The events described above led the government, then headed by the leader of the center-right coalition, Silvio Berlusconi, to declare a state of emergency on May 21, 2008, in relation to the settlements of nomadic communities in the regions of Campania, Lombardy, and Lazio: "Considering that these settlements, due to their extreme precariousness, have caused a situation of serious social alarm, with possible serious repercussions in terms of public order and safety for the local populations."

On October 22, 2008, the prefects of Rome, Milan, and Naples, appointed as special commissioners for what would be defined in public debate as the "nomad emergency," delivered to the Minister of the Interior of the Italian Republic, Roberto Maroni, the results of a "census" carried out the previous summer, which also included the collection of fingerprints from minors, with a view to building "equipped villages" in which to concentrate them: 12,346 people were registered, including 5,436 minors. The 'equipped villages' were built by the far-right mayor of Rome in the following years and concentrated Roma people, rounded up from makeshift settlements, in camps equipped with fences, police checkpoints for entry and exit, and surveillance cameras.

On November 16, 2011, a ruling by the Council of State (No. 06050/2011)[11] annulled the 2008 Declaration of a State of Emergency due to "an absolute lack of factual grounds to justify a declaration of emergency [...] dictated by intentions of ethnic and/or racial discrimination against the Roma community, incompatible with constitutional, EU, and international principles," upholding the ERRC's appeal against the Nomad Plan. The Council of State rejected the appeals

[10] https://www.rivistailmulino.it/a/30-ottobre-2007

[11] https://presidenza.governo.it/USRI/confessioni/doc_normativa_europea/2011/novembre_2011.pdf

of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of the Interior, the Department of Civil Protection, and the territorial offices of the Government of Milan and Naples, Rome, and Naples, which had challenged the ruling of the Lazio Regional Administrative Court, which, on July 1, 2009, had upheld the ERRC's complaint, declaring certain parts of the regulations issued in Milan, Rome, and Naples, and subsequently extended to Turin and Venice by the Prefects appointed by the Ministry of the Interior as Special Commissioners for the Nomad Emergency, to be unlawful.[12]

Also in 2011, amid a widespread perception in Europe of the need for a common intervention plan – coinciding with the new phase of the enlargement process that brought many former Soviet republics into the Union in 2004, including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary (in addition to Malta and Cyprus) and in 2007 led to the entry of Bulgaria and Romania – in implementation of European Commission Communication No. 173 of April 4, 2011, the first Italian national strategy, called the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti, and Caminanti (RSC), was developed on February 24, 2012.

In the first fifteen years of the 2000s, the process of "collective demonization" (Piasere, 2018, p.142) towards Roma and Sinti, which had begun in previous decades, reached its peak in Italy. The institutionalization and subsequent construction of "nomad camps," carried out for decades by local authorities, increased both "their visibility and the visibility of their state of separation" (*Ibid.*), and the new waves of migration linked to the liberalization of visa policies for thousands of people from Eastern Europe amplified this visibility.

With direct intervention by European institutions through a huge flow of information and money, the third sector specifically aimed at Roma and Sinti, but not managed by the communities, exploded.

4. Antiziganism today

Describing current antigypsyism is a challenge in terms of complexity. Two political categories come together: antigypsyism and belonging to the Roma and Sinti communities in the specific Italian context that we have described over the decades.

The most recent data on the current situation show "glimmers of hope" (Ass. July 21, 2024) linked to a slight improvement in schooling data and, above all, to the process of overcoming mono-ethnic settlements, on which efforts have effectively focused in recent years.

In the current landscape, antigypsyism within legislation, bureaucracy, and political discourse in the Italian context is the subject of recent research and studies that show how it has been repeated over the decades, taking on new forms.

The regional laws for Roma and Sinti that have followed one another, and which we analyzed when they were first introduced in the 1980s, have been modified and crystallized into two exemplary laws: Regional Law 11/2015 of Emilia-Romagna and Regional Law 34/2019 of

[12] https://old.asgi.it/home_asgi.php%3Fn=2720&l=it.html

Calabria.
We will focus very briefly on Regional Law 11/2015, while we will return to the second one later (see section 1.1), because, in our opinion, it is important to note how local government policies (regions and municipalities) are moving towards Roma and Sinti communities and how antigypsyism is configured in these institutional contexts.
Emilia Romagna Regional Law 11/2015, which is the result of a long process of consultation with the Roma and Sinti communities in the region, aims to guarantee the right to housing for Roma and Sinti, identifying among the possible housing solutions proposed as a replacement for the old 'rest areas' (the so-called 'camps'): 'transition processes to conventional forms of housing'; 'initiatives, including experimental ones, for self-construction and self-renovation'; but, above all, 'family micro-areas' as 'innovative settlement solutions of public interest' (Art. 3 L.R. 11/2015). However, in the subsequent phase of implementation of the law through the regional directive of the following year, D.G.R. 43/2016, family micro-areas—identified as a housing solution that could meet the needs of the community—inexplicably took on an "extraordinary and temporary" character, "intended to fulfill their function until the families concerned can move to conventional forms of housing," revealing the persistence of a strong sedentary bias in housing policies for Roma and Sinti, which continue to fail to conceive of stable, non-temporary community living, such as that of micro-areas, requested by some of the Sinti families living in Italy. Regional Law 11/2015, considered on paper to be a "perfect law" precisely because of its respect for the needs of the Roma and Sinti it is aimed at, has therefore proved to be a real "betrayal" of expectations and also of the work carried out in political consultation between the parties.
On the other hand, forced evictions and dispossessions continue, as does the exploitation by political forces across party lines of the marginalised situations in which some Italian Roma and Sinti communities still live, albeit to a minimal extent. Politicians play a key role in producing and spreading hate speech and have a political responsibility in the 'de-tabooing' of racist language (Pontrandolfo, Rizzin, 2020). In a recent analysis by Pontrandolfo and Rizzin on the production of antigypsyism in political discourse, which analyzes statements by representatives of political parties currently in the government majority, we see the reappearance of the same criminalizing stereotypes and explicit racialization that we have seen in the substratum of race theories ("they have theft in their blood," "it's in their DNA"), incitement to separate Roma children from their families, violent and dehumanizing language ("shitty gypsies, ticks and parasites") and the criminalization and opposition between "Italians" and Roma, the former in a position of superiority and greater rights than the latter. The construction of a nationalized, humanized, and deserving "us" is contrasted with a denationalized, criminalized, and dehumanized "them" in a public debate that is constantly repeated by the most influential traditional media, such as television (*Ibid.).* In 2018, in the midst of the political election campaign, the current Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni expressed her support for an ethnic census of Roma and, on several occasions and on several platforms, uttered the now unfortunately famous phrase "if you are a nomad, you must nomadize," coining an *ad hoc* term for that alleged nomadism that we have seen constitute one of the cruxes of historical Italian anti-Gypsyism.

The second constant is the presence of marked antigypsyism in traditional and digital media, which play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and, in the case of anti-Gypsyism, are often its main amplifiers. News stories involving Roma or Sinti people are often presented with a marked emphasis on ethnicity. This process of 'ethnicizing crime' creates a distorted perception of reality, where the entire community is criminalized for the actions of individuals.
They also propose a binary and stereotypical representation. On the one hand, the "criminal Roma," on the other, the "romantic" and folkloric Roma, devoted to music and dance. Both representations are reductive and deny the complexity, normality, and diversity within these communities. Stories of success, integration, or ordinary life are almost completely absent. Although the Carta di Roma (Charter of Rome) was signed in 2008 by the National Council of the Order of Journalists (CNOG) and the National Federation of the Italian Press (FNSI) as a code of ethics for more responsible journalism in the treatment of migrants and minorities, these guidelines are still often ignored or violated altogether. Roma and Sinti are still too often "portrayed as scapegoats for social issues" (Di Giovanni, 2012, p.22), creating a vicious circle based on media stigmatization, social marginalization, and the impossibility of integration.
On the other hand, the management *of hate speech* within online media is completely uncontrollable. Platforms do not have a way for users to report antigypsyism as a specific form of racism, and algorithms repost digital content that is sure to engage audiences involving Roma and Sinti communities, as in recent cases involving young women accused of being "subway pickpockets." Content creators on platforms such as YouTube in particular, acting as vigilantes, usually harass young girls, almost always very young, following them with cameras, publicly accusing them of theft and pickpocketing or of being about to do so, filming their faces and publishing them in videos with *clickbait* titles. None of the videos capture the actual crime or wait for the police to arrive, but rather incite vigilante justice and praise the legitimate defense of one's wallet. The young women are subjected to verbal and sometimes physical violence, being pulled, followed, and insulted. They respond and defend themselves as best they can, trying to escape the lynch mob. This is in a country where the presumption of innocence exists and where criminals who have committed far more heinous crimes are interviewed with their faces covered and their voices disguised to protect their right to privacy and that of their families.
We still seem to recognize that status defined as "imperfect citizenship" (Sigona, Monasta, 2006) in which Roma and Sinti still live in Italy, where the search for invisibility is the main way to avoid discrimination and ridicule for those who are never considered "full citizens." (Piasere, 2015, p.77).

Part Two

1. Activism

This part of the discussion reconstructs the history of the Roma and Sinti civil rights movement, which, in light of the historical insights of the previous part, takes on a specific meaning: to reconstruct the responses of the Roma and Sinti communities in decades of negotiation and conflict with the majority community. This inevitably involves reconstructing the policies of public institutions and of an entire society towards its minority.

To date, we distinguish two generations corresponding to two phases within the movement, which will be analyzed as follows: the first phase (1990s-2012): from the 1990s until the implementation of the first national strategy in 2012, characterized by the genesis of some fundamental vocations for the movement in Italy and by a reorganization with respect to the secondary role of previous years, leading to the discovery of a leading role by representatives of the Roma , and Sinti communities in the creation and management of Roma and Sinti civil society. This phase of genesis was led by an old guard of pioneers, many of whom had broken away from the religious mediation of the 1970s and 1980s, some linked to international organizations, some linked to academia, some linked to Catholic religious' organizations, some with a history of local socio-political struggle, and others with a history of cultural and linguistic mediation and dissemination. They are surrounded by volunteers, collaborators, and supporters who are Roma and Sinti, but also non-Roma and non-Sinti.

A second phase (2012-present), from the failure of the first national strategy to the present day, characterized by a slow process of detachment from the demands of the pioneers and a gradual adherence to methodologies and objectives more closely linked to international activism.

This second phase is characterized by a new wave of activism by Artivists and Influencers formed by European Roma civil society and international organizations, but well rooted in the local fabric where it was formed, which creates content, petitions, and social campaigns, expresses itself mainly through web platforms, and also finds its main form of struggle and adherence to the movement in artistic expression.

1.1 Mediators and disseminators

To date, it has only been possible to reconstruct the history of the Romani movement in stages; this research is undoubtedly necessary for reconciliation and genuine mutual understanding, and we believe it is urgent to explore it further in the Italian context. We will therefore attempt to describe these phases through the voices of the protagonists who have made themselves available or whose testimonies have been collected by the communities themselves on other occasions, or whom we have heard in public speeches that we have been fortunate enough to attend, in dialogue with the chronological reconstruction made previously and with some positions of international *Romani studies* and the anthropology of Romani groups in the Italian context. The interpretation of these events is also made in light of three focuses in the analysis,

which we also deduce from the previous theoretical reflections, but above all from the observation of the most recent dynamics and the accounts of the leaders.
The first focus concerns the dynamics of invisibility, visibility, and hypervisibility of activism that have characterized and continue to characterize the movement in line with the strategies adopted by the communities themselves over the decades, even overlapping them. These have always been a source of internal conflict within the movement that is still detectable today. The second is the education/re-education dichotomy mentioned above, which the movement still grapples with, especially when reflecting on its origins.
The last issue concerns the ongoing negotiation between simplification and complexity, even on the part of the activists themselves, whereby the movement, in an attempt to account for the political nature of the movement, which has also been noted by scholars, is forced to leave out parts of itself.
According to the activists' account, in the system we have described of post-war return to temporary settlements, camps, in northern Italy, but also to sedentary dwellings in central and southern Italy, in a condition of itinerancy in which the Catholic Church intervened with pastoral aims that soon became welfare and re-educational, we can attribute the foundation in the 1970s of Opera Nomadi and then Aizo to the precursors of the birth of Roma and Sinti activism.
Opera Nomadi, as already mentioned, was founded in 1966 and for decades held the primacy in mediating between the state and the communities. From Bolzano, it spread throughout the peninsula, reaching 27 local sections that worked with increasing autonomy. Working mainly with Sinti families, it decided that the term 'nomadi' (nomads) was the most appropriate way to convey the tradition of itinerancy as their most characteristic feature. This name was in fact one of the main simplifications of the complexity of the communities present in Italy and, without exaggeration, it changed the history of the image of Italian Roma and Sinti communities forever.
The local presidents, who for the first twenty years were always non-Roma and non-Sinti, sometimes also religious and belonging to the Catholic Church, managed the offices, liaising mainly with local authorities and trying to identify the needs of the communities. This will happen above all in the northeast and for the Sinti community, for whom we have seen the development of those experimental actions that we have seen to be at the basis of the creation of regional laws and camps to regulate and manage the stopping places of communities linked to a tradition of itinerancy, and those linked to the schooling of minors. At the same time, Opera Nomadi will begin collecting and studying memories of deportation, carrying out initial research and publishing it in the magazine Lacio Drom and later in specific publications through the work of journalist Giovanna Boursier. Even today, in the words of President Massimo Converso, Opera Nomadi's archive of testimonies concerning the memory of persecution is the most extensive available, as is the photographic archive of the history of Italian Sinti traveling shows.
This widespread presence and the progressive involvement of members of the community in various capacities led to the growth of many vocations among those who would later form the first generation of leaders of the Roma and Sinti movement in Italy.
We would like to highlight a document dating back to this very early preparatory phase, part of

the personal archive of Father Mauro Rabatti, president of the Opera Nomadi di Prato, which has been added to the aforementioned Storie nella Storia platform. The document is the 1971 bulletin "Devel dic pren le sinti"[13] , which was created through collaboration between the Centro Studi Sinti in Turin and the Sinti of Cuneo, with the aim of becoming a newspaper made by the Sinti for the Sinti, to promote unity, self-confidence, and solidarity among the communities. It contains an appeal to the Sinti throughout Italy from a group calling themselves "the Sinti of Cuneo" who: "encourage them not to be ashamed of their identity and to unite to fight prejudice; emphasize that unity and solidarity are essential to improve living conditions and demonstrate that 'gypsy' does not mean 'thief'." Ten "concrete proposals" are listed by the Sinti of Cuneo to improve life in the camp. Although it has not been possible to trace the authors of the Bulletin, which is signed only with names that could be "Romano Lav," i.e., Rom names rather than registered names, and although the Sinti Study Center no longer appears to be active, we report the concrete proposals to indicate how the initiative to organize and move together towards common needs has its roots far back in time in dynamics that do not seem to be directly linked to Opera Nomadi, but which the organization seems to have simply intercepted. The proposals were: "to move the camp to a safer area, away from the road; to create a school in the camp (mornings: literacy; afternoons: crafts) for children and adults; to build temporary houses for those in need; to promote traditional crafts and outdoor work; revive ancient crafts with the help of elderly Sinti; set up a craft workshop in the camp; create an internal organization of heads of families to manage the camp; promote and study the Sinta language; teach the history of the Sinti in school, rather than only that of the gagé (non-Sinti); oppose unjust laws such as the 'mandatory expulsion order' and municipal 'anti-parking' ordinances. The Bulletin testifies to "the mistrust of the authorities and the gagé, which forces them to move constantly" and contains an "invitation to all Sinti to collaborate" and to "respond to proposals and send news, ideas, and letters to maintain contact between communities."

The document is a strong call for collective action, for the assertion of rights and the enhancement of Sinti identity and culture, with a view to social redemption and autonomy that we consider to be of inestimable value, especially as a testimony to the first responses, in the contemporary era, to acts of antigypsyism perpetuated by municipalities such as "expulsion orders."

During the same period, the association AIZO ([14] , Italian Association of Gypsies Today) was founded in Turin, directed since its inception by Dr. Carla Osella. Also inspired by Catholicism, it was created at the request of the community and was established as an association, gathering "the support of 431 Sinti families."

After two years of recreational activities, the Sinti community asked to open a school, an "incredible" idea at the time, given that children did not attend public schools and "survival was considered the primary objective." Founded by three Sinti and three non-Sinti, the school began in a small house thanks to the support of the Municipality of Turin and operated for 23 years,

[13] https://storie-nella-storia.it/archivio-storico-lacio-drom/Arte.

[14] https://www.aizo.it/aizo-rom-sinti/

welcoming over 6,000 children and teaching in the regional dialect, which was considered the lingua franca.
It should be noted that the activities in this initial phase were entirely focused on mediation using entirely experimental methods and, according to part of the movement, any mistakes that may have been made can also be attributed to this trial-and-error approach, responding to evolving needs in relation to the state's new regulatory requirements. At the end of the 1980s, a self-critical reflection began both on experiences considered failures, such as special schools, and on the lack of involvement and decision-making power of the Roma and Sinti themselves within the organization.
The first demand for the direct participation of Roma and Sinti in the activities of pro-Roma and pro-Sinti associations was represented by the founding of the Thèm Romanó association in Lanciano, in the province of Chieti, by Santino Spinelli in 1990. A musician and composer, Santino Spinelli began to involve the audience at his concerts in spreading awareness of the Romani language and culture in a way he called a 'seminar-concert', which 'was interesting because it combined art with entertainment, and culture too, so to speak, when we talked, but at the same time it was also a statement, it was unintentionally and indirectly activism, because everything was aimed at enhancing and promoting this enormous artistic and cultural heritage"[15] . Thèm Romanò's journey has grown over time and continues today. For the first generation, it represents one of the examples of the birth of Romani and Sinti activism and is certainly the ultimate representation of a struggle fought through artistic expression.
Since 1994, it has promoted and organized the Amico Rom International Art Competition in Lanciano, which includes poetry, fiction, theater, photography, drawing, painting, sculpture, music, essays, cinema (documentaries and films) and is open to published and unpublished works.
The path taken by the members of Opera Nomadi, on the other hand, led to the departure of some of its members starting in the 1990s. According to Carlo Berini[16] , now president of the Sukar Drom association in Mantua, it was the election of the first Sinti president of Opera Nomadi, Bernardino Torsi, in Mantua in 1992 that marked the beginning of the dissolution of the organization's historical structure. The election of a Sinti president led the members of the community to embark on a new path of autonomy from the national leadership. From this phase of slow detachment, which lasted about a decade, various associations were born. In 2007, at the instigation of Sukar Drom (Bernardino Torino, Yuri Del Bar, Carlo Berini in Mantua), Nevo Drom (Radames Gabrielli in Bolzano), Rom e Sinti e Politica (Nazareno Gabrielli in Pescara) merged to form the Comitato Rom e Sinti Insieme (Rom and Sinti Together Committee). In 2009, in Mantua, the Committee became the Federazione Rom e Sinti Insieme (Rom and Sinti Together Federation), with around forty Sinti and Roma associations formed in the meantime throughout the country among its members. It launched the first bill for the recognition of linguistic minority status and promoted the creation of Sinti and Roma associations throughout Italy. It supported

[15] Ethnographic interview, 09/25/23.
[16] Ethnographic interview, 03.09.25

the need for direct mediation through national and regional offices within which the presence of community representatives could make participation effective[17] . The main objective is undoubtedly the active and direct participation of Roma and Sinti in decision-making processes affecting their communities, a political participation that had first materialized in 2005 with the election of Yuri Del Bar to the Mantua City Council and had therefore proven to be feasible.

According to activists, the Spinelli family's efforts at the international level, which led to their entry into the IRU, of which Santino Spinelli is now one of the vice presidents, and , were contemporary with the hospitality given to the 6th World Congress of the IRU (International Romani Union) in Lanciano in 2004, with the participation of over 200 delegates from 39 countries.

In the following years, the movement focused on a number of common objectives, but each member channeled their energies into different strategies. We will try to summarize this complexity, focusing in particular on the direct responses to the acts of antigypsyism that we highlighted earlier.

The Sukar Drom association and the Associazione 21 Luglio, with the support of ASGI (Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration), undertook a series of crucial legal battles, using the judicial system to combat discriminatory policies and public statements. These lawsuits aimed not only to obtain justice for individuals, but also to dismantle the political and cultural consensus that normalizes racial discrimination.

In 2009, a historic ruling by the Verona court definitively convicted Flavio Tosi, then mayor of Verona, and five other members of the Northern League, who in 2001 had launched a racist campaign against the Sinti people of Verona. Evicted from their place of residence, described as an "illegal camp," Italian Sinti families wandered from one open space to another throughout the summer until they were settled in a parking lot. This was accompanied by a violent media campaign and a petition to drive them out of the city. The Veronese Sinti testified at the trial, supported by the then Opera Nomadi di Mantova, which later merged into the autonomous association Sukar Drom, and by ASGI (Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration). Mayor Tosi was sentenced to two months in prison for 'racist propaganda', plus €50,000 to be paid to the victims, in addition to all legal costs[18] .

Another emblematic case is the judicial response to the so-called “Nomad Emergency Plan” implemented by the Berlusconi government in 2008, which, presented as a response to a public order emergency, effectively institutionalized discrimination on ethnic grounds. The most serious element was the decision to conduct a census of Roma settlements, including the collection of fingerprints, even from minors.

In 2013, in an equally historic ruling, the Civil Court of Rome recognized that Italian Roma citizen Elviz Salkanovic had been the victim of ethnic discrimination during the operations of the "Nomad Plan" in 2010, when, despite being in possession of a valid identity document, his fingerprints were taken by the police. The man, supported by Associazione 21 luglio, ASGI, and

[17] https://comitatoromsinti.blogspot.com/2007/

[18] https://sucardrom.blogspot.com/search?q=+flavio+tosi

Open Society Justice Initiative, appealed to the court, arguing that the identification was discriminatory and harmful to his dignity. Three years later, the court ruled that the fingerprinting was an act of discrimination based on ethnic origin and ordered the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of the Interior to pay €8,000 in moral damages[19] .

These are just two examples of associations responding to institutional antigypsyism through legal action. These examples legitimize institutional criticism, demonstrating that this was not a political opinion but an objective violation of fundamental rights. They also set a legal and cultural precedent, making it more difficult for future administrations to repeat similar practices in such an explicit form. Furthermore, they bring the issue to the European level, focusing the attention of European institutions on events in the country.

The value of these legal battles goes far beyond the outcome of individual cases. They certainly have strategic and cultural value, providing a means of defense for marginalized communities that often lack access to traditional channels of representation and aiming to de-normalize discrimination by building anti-racist case law.

Since its foundation in 2010, the Associazione 21 Luglio, chaired by and Carlo Stasolla, has focused on that part of the Roma and Sinti communities living in marginalised housing situations and therefore on the reality of the camps, with a strategy aimed primarily at quantitative and qualitative research. Today, it is considered a point of reference at European and national level in this field.

A few years later, the Kethane Movement was founded in Milan, born out of a program led and funded by the European Council (RomAct) to train mediators to work directly with institutions and local authorities, bypassing associative structures. From the outset, it has been led by Dijana Pavlovic, who was already active in the Roma and Sinti Federation. In recent years, the activists of the Khetane Movement have represented the multifaceted and complex nature of the movement, embodying different demands within the movement itself. This *grassroots* activism adopts methodologies that are completely different from those previously adopted, reaching out too many young people from the communities and training them in the tools of democratic consultation through the experience of the Political School, so that they are able to engage directly with the authorities through methods of civic action: assembly participation, petitions, flash mobs, and the use of new languages of communication that were developing in those years. It therefore responds to the need to overcome certain internal dynamics within the association and to train a new generation, thus creating a generational change and meeting the new requirements of European planning for Roma and Sinti.

We conclude this brief overview of the history of the movement by mentioning the experience of the Calabrian Roma communities that formed an association in 2008 under the name Lav Romanò[20] under the leadership of Luigi Bevilacqua, now deceased, which is still active today with Fiore Manzo as president.

In our opinion, Lav Romanò's experience is important both because it highlights the particular

[19] https://www.old.asgi.it/home_asgi.php%3Fn=2758&l=it.html

[20] https://lavromano.jimdofree.com/

case of residential segregation in "ghetto neighborhoods" in Calabria and because it led to the enactment in 2019 of Regional Law No. 41 "Integration and promotion of the Romani minority." The law therefore leads to the recognition, albeit at the regional level, of the Roma as a linguistic and cultural minority and allocates funding for the promotion of April 8 as "International Roma Day" (Art. 2 L.R. 41/2019). All those who consider linguistic and cultural recognition a priority will rally around the importance of this law. While its detractors emphasize that the plan of action is too bland in terms of both content and the scope of funding that the law allocates to cultural activities, its supporters consider it a fundamental precedent in local legislation, serving as a driving force and example for other regions until recognition is achieved at the national level.

2. New activism

The civil rights movement of the Roma and Sinti communities in Italy is now a complex, fragmented, and constantly evolving reality, operating in one of the most difficult social and political contexts in Europe. It is currently undergoing a new phase, marked by the establishment in 2017 of the National Platform and the Roma and Sinti Forum as consultative bodies for the drafting and implementation of the National Strategy 2022-2030.

The contemporary movement is currently based on a number of fundamental pillars: undoubtedly the historical and community associations, whose origins and development we have briefly described, as pioneers in bringing the demands of the communities to the institutional level; a new crucial role played by Roma women of different social backgrounds, ages, and origins at the forefront of the movement, fighting both against external discrimination and for emancipation within their own communities; a new generation of intellectuals and activists, young Roma and Sinti women and men, often born and raised in Italy, university graduates and perfectly integrated into the social fabric, who are redefining the movement through art, music, literature, and a conscious use of social media, publicly challenging stereotypes in order to be recognized as full citizens and bearers of a "living culture."

The movement's demands now focus in various ways on specific areas where discrimination is most acute. There are some macro issues that we have seen emerge over the decades as priorities, such as the right to housing and the struggle to overcome institutionalized "nomad camps," perhaps the most symbolic battle. The movement challenges this model of housing segregation, calling for inclusive housing policies and denouncing forced evictions as violations of fundamental human rights. The second of these macro issues is the right to education, where the movement's action aims to combat high school dropout rates, promoting the role of cultural mediators and fighting against the reality of de facto 'differential' classes. The goal is quality education that, while respecting cultural identity, opens up all the possibilities of the future to the younger generations. The third macro theme, which cuts across all associations, is the fight against institutional anti-Gypsyism, for the recognition of antigypsyism as a specific form of racism, and for the fight against discrimination in law enforcement, the media, and access to work and healthcare. Finally, we report on the fight for the recognition of the Romani

ethnic-linguistic minority, which is also cross-cutting but considered a priority only by part of the movement, and we conclude with the fight for the recognition, awareness, and dissemination of the historical memory of deportation and persecution during World War II, i.e., the recognition of the Porrajmos.
From the observation made during the event '(More) Participation, Inclusion and Equality. Roma and Sinti in Italy in the new National Strategy', organized by UNAR in collaboration with the Municipality of Rome and Formez PA, in the presence of the Platform of Roma and Sinti Communities and the Forum for the presentation of the new National Strategy, it is clear that these issues are somewhat polarized between two extremes of the movement in a struggle articulated mainly through the linguistic and cultural dimension as a weapon of dissemination to combat antigypsyism and as a priority pursued by UCRI (Union of Italian Romani Communities), which supports many of the "Artivists" we will mention later; a second, on the other hand, considers the right to housing a priority, which on this occasion seemed to revolve around the Kethane Movement.
There are also relatively "new" themes in Italian activism, such as the battle against cultural appropriation, support for ethnic coming out, and a focus on gender and intersectional dynamics, particularly concerning the LGBTQ+ community within the Roma and Sinti communities. A final point, which emerges purely from the ethnographic interviews conducted for this research, is what is referred to as the invisibility of the Sinti, who disappear due to the umbrella term 'Roma' adopted at European level (despite the fact that in the official Italian context, the terms Roma and Sinti are used).
Many of the new protagonists of the movement are making artistic expression the focus of their activism, concentrating on cultural dissemination and the fight against stereotypes. They still experience persistent tensions within the movement: the struggle between invisibility (as a survival strategy) and hypervisibility (necessary for advocacy) through social media, and the constant negotiation between simplifying their message for the public and representing their immense internal diversity.

2.1 Artivists

In the complex and often conflictual public narrative surrounding the Roma and Sinti communities in Italy, a powerful and transformative cultural phenomenon is gaining ground: artivism. This neologism, a syncretism of 'art' and 'activism', defines the work of Roma and Sinti artists, musicians, writers, and filmmakers who use creative languages not only to express their own aesthetics, but also to combat antigypsyism and centuries-old stereotypes, reclaim a denied and sometimes hidden identity, and open a dialogue on equal terms with the majority society. Roma and Sinti artivists in Italy are today the protagonists of a silent revolution that, through beauty and criticism, is rewriting their own history from within. They are young women and men from different local backgrounds and with different personal stories, in which certain decisive events and encounters with representatives of the first generation of the movement in Italy and

with European realities have been the genesis of their commitment. They direct their artistic production towards the structural antigypsyism that we have seen to be deeply rooted and prevalent, which denies the human and cultural complexity of these communities, erasing their history, internal diversity, and right to self-determination.
Traditional artistic experiences, often confined to folkloric spaces or marketed as 'ethnic', risk being absorbed by dominant narratives that appropriate them without contextualising or questioning them. Artivism, on the contrary, makes the deconstruction of certain clichés its strong point, expressing itself through a plurality of languages, each with a specific strategy of intervention.

We will attempt to describe the most wide-ranging and interesting current experiences, which are linked to a specific professional choice, selected exclusively on the basis of discussions with members of the community, primarily to provide an overview of the issues and methods currently in use. We will attempt to categorize these experiences by field, insofar as artistic expression can be clearly defined.

Music: Music is one of the forms of expression that has most characterized Romani artistic production over the centuries, and artivists imbue it with new meanings. The Spinelli family's Alexian Group[21] has a long history, whose seminar-concert format we described earlier. Among their many experiences at national and international level, the awards and recognitions they have received and their participation in the most important international festivals, we would like to mention their recent concerts in historic venues of Italian musical culture such as the Teatro alla Scala in Milan and the Teatro San Carlo in Naples, which take on extraordinary symbolic significance in terms of the recognition of the Romani musical tradition and the affirmation of how alive, contemporary and in dialogue with the world it is. The lyrics, sometimes in the Romani language, speak of freedom, cultural resistance, and dignity, transforming each concert into a musical manifesto. The violinist of the Alexian Group is Gennaro Spinelli, whom we focus on because of the role he has taken on in recent years. Gennaro Spinelli grew up in a family of activists and musicians. His story is not one of rediscovering his identity, as we will see later, but we consider it unique because, as president of UCRI, he is leading the movement into a completely new phase. Gennaro Spinelli fully embraces the strategy of hypervisibility and, through content on social media platforms, participation as UCRI spokesperson on major Italian television programs, and the publication of informative texts written in extremely simple and direct language, he envelops activism in a contemporary dimension. The movement's opinions on him are mixed, both with regard to the 'culturalist' priority that leads UCRI to mainly support linguistic and cultural research and dissemination projects, and with regard to the simplification of some more complex issues, such as the assertion that 'Italian Roma have never been nomads', which completely overlooks the tradition of itinerancy among the Sinti in the north-east or, in any case, reduces the scope and historical objectivity of their forced sedentarisation in the

[21] http://www.alexian.it/

1970s and 1980s, or ends up not including them in the category. On the other hand, those in the movement who shift the cultural priority and believe in hypervisibility see in the figure of Gennaro Spinelli the future of the movement and the true leadership of 'nothing about us, without us' (Charlton, 1998).
In this focus on music, we also mention Claudio 'Cavallo' Giannotti and Mascarimirì, who bear witness to one of those dynamics between 'invisibility and visibility' that have characterized the Roma and Sinti communities over the decades and bring the experience of the Roma of Salento, who are not present in the public debate, to the fore. [22]Through the fusion of traditional Salento music and the sounds of the Romani tradition in the album Gitanistan and the documentary of the same name, the group recounts the past of the Salento Romani families dedicated to horse breeding and trading as a traditional activity and the tradition of pizzica scherma during the days of the Feast of San Rocco in Torrepaduli (Ruffano). The documentary overlaps the stories of ordinary discrimination against three generations of Salento Roma families with institutional antigypsyism and hate speech in the media towards Roma from the former Yugoslavia who are victims of the 'camp system', bringing to light the forgotten history of these 'disappeared' communities, their importance in the culture and economic and social history of Salento, and denouncing the recurrence of antigypsyism in different forms, but always the same. Since his very first album, "Li mulè de li gagè," he has translated a Salento dialect expletive into Romanès in an irreverent dimension of revenge through language and music.

Literature: writing is one of the most prolific and interesting dimensions of current Artivism. Writers such as Morena Pedriali Errani and newcomers such as Virginia Spinelli use the written word to restore historical and emotional depth to communities described only in sociological or crime news terms.

Morena Pedriali Errani is a Sinti writer who comes from a circus family in the province of Ferrara. In 2017, she was a semifinalist in the Campiello Prize Youth section with her story *Khorakhanè.* In 2024, she published *Prima che chiudiate gli occhi (Before You Close Your Eyes)* for Giulio Perroni Editori, in which she recounts the persecution and deportation of Roma and Sinti in Italy through the eyes of the young Jezebel with evocative imagery. She recounts the difficulty of recounting this historical memory, which is also a family memory, both in collecting testimonies that would serve as the foundation for writing this story, given the Sinti tradition of not talking about their dead, and in the responsibility of doing them justice. She also emphasizes the importance of writing as a means of "reclaiming one's own narrative, choosing one's own way of doing so." She has been active at the local level in the difficult city of Ferrara since she was very young, campaigning for the Kethane Movement, for which she deals with issues related to communication, including through social media platforms. Today, she has distanced herself from the hypervisibility of communities through social media and, as an activist, feels closer to a "dimension of language, thought, and community struggle" than to the protagonism and

[22] https://www.romarchive.eu/en/collection/gitanistan-lo-stato-immaginario-dei-rom-salentini/

isolation that social media dynamics can lead to.

Virginia Spinelli is a Romani writer from Pescara, Abruzzo, who is close to the UCRI organization, thanks to which she became involved in activism. She began writing during a period of double displacement, both within her community and outside it, where she faced discrimination in accessing work because she was recognized as Roma. She recounts a personal journey of liberation and salvation through writing and study, to which she returned with great sacrifice and passion. Today she is a student of literature at the University of Chieti. She has published *Con cura* for Bookapoem and has written many pieces for UNAR and UCRI events and meetings. She is very active on social media, where she shares her thoughts and experiences of emancipation through the Romani language and words. In the appendix is an unpublished work donated by the author to this research (Appendix A).

Simonetta Malinverno is a Sinti activist from Modena, now spokesperson for the Amici di Via Django association. She began her commitment to the Modena community through dynamics related to the overcoming of the Via Baccelleria camp in 2007 and over time became a point of reference for activism related to gender dynamics and the right to housing. She participates in the round tables set up by the Emilia Romagna region for the drafting of Regional Law 11/2015 and for the regional and national strategy. She writes to tell the story of her community and to renegotiate her personal history, torn between life in the camp and life in an apartment, life at the Luna Park and the struggle of political negotiation with local authorities. Her writing is highly personal and vivid, a form of 'survival' writing driven by the desire to tell the story of the Sinti and their culture to prevent it from disappearing under the weight of the difficulty of understanding itinerancy and the travelling entertainment profession. The appendix contains an unpublished work donated by the author to this research (Appendix B).

Santino Spinelli stands out in Italian poetry, for whom writing in Romani is an act of linguistic resistance and preservation of memory. Spinelli's poetry is a cry of pain and pride that recalls the genocide of Roma and Sinti and his own family history, which is shared by communities throughout Europe. In the appendix, we include the poem Auschwitz, engraved on the stone of the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, inaugurated on October 24, 2012, and the poem *Per non dimenticare (Lest We Forget)*, which accompanies the commemorative plaque on display in Padua, in the Museum of Internment since 1997 (Appendix C).

The performing and visual arts are a very lively and prolific current within Romani and Sinti artivism. These artivists use the body, images, and installations to subvert hegemonic views. Their works often address themes such as memory, gender identity within the community, and the violence of anti-Gypsyism. Staging one's body in institutional spaces such as museums, galleries, and institutional halls is in itself a political act: it is an affirmation of presence and the right to cultural citizenship.

Luna De Rosa[23] is a Romani artist from Abruzzo. Marginalized and discriminated against because of her ethnicity, she began to reflect on her origins after moving to Milan to study and completing what she describes as a sort of "identity migration." She began to translate themes related to her community into her art, encouraged by the Spinelli family, who recognized her as a Roma artist of excellence and encouraged her to become a spokesperson for her identity and culture. At the heart of her artistic and activist practice is the exploration of her own identity, but also the stories of other women, especially Roma and Sinti women, and "an idea of art as a form of resistance but also as a space to give voice to these silent stories." Luna De Rosa's works are exhibited throughout Europe, the latest of which, *Rom & Sinti - Motherhood Otherland*, is on display at the Triennale di Milano. In the appendix (Appendix D) is the collage *La struttura dell'antiziganismo (The Structure of Anti-Gypsyism), in wool and oil,* where "multimedia and multimateriality represent the complex and multifaceted nature of anti-Gypsyism" and where various figurative suggestions inspired by historical events are linked by a common thread: "the resilience of Roma populations throughout history."

Ivana Nikolić is a Romani performer from Turin with Bosnian origins. She began her activism in her neighborhood working with children and young people, graduated with a degree in education sciences, and was an activist and collaborator with various Italian and European organizations in the 2010s. Today she is a dancer and teacher of Romani dance. She has written and performed in theater productions (*Coming out etnico: essere orgogliosi di essere rom e sinti)* of what she defines as "social theater," in which she recognizes a personal form of expression, but currently expresses her activism through the creation of digital content. Activism through social media is the newest form that the movement has taken on today. In the Italian context, it is becoming increasingly important both for its ability to intercept different interactions of the social media audience with regard to the issues raised, and for the innovative nature of the issues themselves, such as coming etnico, intersectionality, and self-critical reflections on the movement itself. Through the Instagram profile *Non chiamateci zingare (Father't call us gypsies)* and the podcast *+Rom-Rum*[24] , Ivana Nikolić manages to bring together Roma and Sinti activists with other associations linked to other minorities and acts as a disseminator and influencer in the true sense of the word. The goal is to dismantle stereotypes through direct and mutual knowledge and the direct and personal participation of community members, while also conveying the message of the importance of asserting one's identity and defending and taking pride in one's belonging. The trailer for the third season of the *+Rom-Rum* podcast is included in the appendix (Appendix E).

Cinema is a form of artistic expression in which we find fewer examples. There are many documentaries made by non-Roma and non-Sinti directors in collaboration with Roma and Sinti associations and focusing on the communities, but among Roma directors, the most important

[23] https://www.lunaderosa.com/it

[24] https://www.instagram.com/reel/DKe6TEAPctj/?igsh=MTgydXExeHpqaWFxbw==

example is that of Romani director Laura Halilović[25] (Me, My Roma Family and Woody Allen, 2009; Io rom romantica (Me, My *Romani Family* and *Woody* Allen, 2014). Laura Halilović is not an activist, but the story told in the documentary Io*, la mia famiglia rom e Woody Allen* takes on a highly symbolic value in recounting the experience of the director's family 'leaving the camp' and starting a new life in an apartment. This is one of the very few cases of reappropriation of the narrative of the reality of the life of Roma from the former Yugoslavia in Italy, in which the themes are the future aspirations of a young woman grappling with the negotiation of her family and cultural traditions, such as marriage.

We also include fashion design in this review, placing it within artistic expressions because, in the global fashion scene, dominated by often homogeneous narratives, powerful voices are emerging that challenge centuries-old stereotypes and rewrite the rules of aesthetics and identity. In this field, we mention the Sinti designer Noel Maggini[26] , a Sinti designer from Prato, who embodies a journey of reconnection with his Sinti roots through fashion. His aesthetic is distinguished by an elegant sobriety, far from the folkloric and tacky stereotypes often associated with Romani culture in the collective imagination. Maggini performs an essential deconstruction of traditional elements. His inspiration comes from family memories: his grandmothers' gold jewelry, the dignity of his community's clothing, the search for a discreet but deeply rooted beauty that transforms fashion into an emotional archive. Noel Maggini collaborates with the Kethane Movement, but his commitment to the community is entirely devoted to his art.

We also mention Sara Cetty[27] , the stage name of Concetta Sarachella, a Romani designer from Isernia, who responds to the stereotype of Romani poverty with abundance, explosions of color, majestic volumes, golden embroidery, and luxurious fabrics that echo, in a hyper-contemporary key, the traditional splendor of the dresses worn by Roma women in Eastern Europe. While the image of Roma women is often victimized or exoticized, she proposes a powerful, regal, and intrepid femininity. Her models, often members of the community, walk the runway, transforming fashion into a political statement. Comparing Maggini and Cetty, we discover not a contrast, but a fruitful dialogue. Both, starting from different sensibilities, fight the same battle against cultural homogenization and prejudice.

We conclude this overview with Rašhid Nikolić[28] , a Roma puppeteer and stand-up comedian from Turin with Bosnian origins. Rašhid Nikolić, alias *The Gypsy Marionettist,* has been performing his show of the same name in Turin since 2012, believing in the "mystical power of puppets" and staging a composite narrative of entertainment, twists and turns, popularization, and material culture. Similarly, with his stand-up show "Rom vs tutti" (Roma vs everyone), he represents in Italy

[25] https://www.romarchive.eu/en/collection/p/laura-halilovic/
[26] https://noellmaggini.it/?srsltid=AfmBOoqIQdcFZE3JlCIBikcUxgQ6P70w3JqTxcK-TugKuAz26NQ40RNa
[27] https://www.facebook.com/stiliamociconsaracetty/?locale=it_IT
[28] https://www.thegipsymarionettist.com/

that strand of stand-up comedy known as "Ethnic Humor," through which he dialogues with the audience, exploring the more or less hidden or overt stereotypes about the Roma community. He is also very active on social media, where he fights targeted battles against cultural appropriation and the racism hidden in the use of the term "gypsy" for commercial purposes and against antigypsyism in the traditional media. The movement considers him one of the most controversial figures at present, and opinions vary across generations, ranging from contemptuous accusations of self-promotion and prioritizing battles for their own sake, to unconditional support and great admiration for his ability to juggle new media and keep the debate on the Roma and Sinti communities alive and fueled every day. Attached is a transcript of an excerpt from the show *The Gypsy Marionettist (*Appendix E).

Despite its vitality, Romani and Sinti artivism in Italy faces considerable challenges. Certainly, the lack of established networks and funding in the arts and the persistence of prejudice within cultural institutions themselves make it difficult to access funding and visibility. In addition, there is the constant danger of being confined to an 'ethnic enclosure' that recognizes them only as 'Roma artists' or, conversely, considers only their commitment and the issues affecting their communities, rather than their artistic production itself and its themes as a source of inspiration. Many artivists fight on several fronts: against external antigypsyism and against dynamics within their own communities. However, the future of this movement looks incredibly interesting. The emergence of autonomous cultural associations, the strategic use of social media to bypass traditional gatekeepers, and the creation of transnational networks with other Romani artivists in Europe are multiplying the resonance of these voices. Roma and Sinti artivists in Italy are carrying out a fundamental cultural and political operation: they are transforming their community from the object of narration to the subject of narration. Through their works, they are not asking for pity or forced integration, but for recognition, justice, and the right to complexity.

Concluding reflections

The analysis presented here demonstrates the persistence and adaptation of antigypsyism in the Italian context. Antigypsyism in Italy is not an episodic phenomenon, but a structural and persistent racism that has adapted over time, moving from fascist racial laws and post-war re-education policies to the "camp system" and contemporary media and political criminalization. Roma and Sinti communities are subject to a paradox whereby they are simultaneously hyper-visible as scapegoats in public and political discourse, and invisible in their human, historical, and cultural complexity. Public policies, such as the camp system, have increased this negative visibility, crystallizing segregation.

Despite centuries of discrimination in various forms and ways, Roma and Sinti communities have always demonstrated resilience and strategic capacity for action. The history of the civil rights movement is the story of a gradual and tenacious conquest of self-representation, which has led from early external mediation to activism increasingly driven by the communities themselves.

Today, the emergence of 'artivism', the commitment to artistic production, represents a mature and powerful phase in the struggle. Art has become the preferred tool of the younger generations to dismantle stereotypes, reclaim a positive and complex identity, and rewrite their own narrative, taking it away from those who have historically exploited or denied it.

The history of the movement and its demands show that combating antigypsyism requires not only the overcoming of discriminatory laws and policies, but also a recognition of historical responsibilities, a genuine listening to the voices of communities, and a h l commitment to supporting their struggles for the recognition of rights and full citizenship.

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Appendix A.

Jekh duj Trin by Virginia Spinelli

Iav, Ivan whispered to me that night as we hid in a dead-end alley.

Come.
The sky was open, night blue.

I can smell whoever was here and left immediately afterwards.

Passing through, perhaps myself.

Slow footsteps, scattered hay.
I hear chords from afar, someone is playing.
Someone is thinking about tidying up. Someone is thinking about the rest.
I glimpse the blue people.
No them, roots.

Barefoot, on the move.
So free to be themselves among themselves.

Play again, repeats the little girl.

jekh
duj
Trin

They speak a language unknown to me, but I am learning.

Flashback:

A girl with black eyes looks at me suspiciously, calling me caggio; to her, I am a stranger.

"Giattù!" she shouts.
Go away.
As if she were afraid that others would judge something she cared about.

The intimacy of a lit fire.

Her skin is so amber-colored, she wears white tights and torn overalls. She makes me smile, but I Father't let her see.
She's different from other girls.
She has fire in her eyes.

I am drawn to her.

Her wavy hair is tied back in a funny little ponytail.
You can see that she has grown up too quickly.
She scrutinizes me, looks inside me, and I am afraid.

I ask her name, she doesn't answer.
She hints at a smile.

"Iav," she says, without caring who I am.
She is not afraid.
She challenges me, makes me vulnerable.

I'm screwed, I say to myself.

Nina, that's her name.

She nods, she doesn't speak, her body communicates for her.
Nina notices everything.

I find out her name because she has a tag with her name on it.
Written in blue.

I bare my arms, roll up my shirt sleeves, and sit down in front of her.
Yet we are not at a police station.
I want to know.

«Tell me your story», Nina

She looks up and glares at me.

"What do you want to know? Did you come here like everyone else to extract information so you can tell a story? The usual story of a Roma girl living in pitiful conditions?"

Nina speaks perfect Italian.

«Enná» she shouts.
No.

«Do you want to know my story, stranger? » She calls me stranger to emphasize her distrust.

She's mocking me.
She bursts out laughing, and I think to myself: what beautiful teeth.

He sits down, his awareness overwhelms me.

«I'm Nina and I'm an educato»;

I'm taken aback.

"Continue," I say to her.

From here, a stream of consciousness:

«I grew up between these thin walls, the wind knocked them down.
I felt like a stranger to myself and I was a stranger here. I didn't recognize myself, now I know who I am»;

I Father't immediately understand her intent, I let her talk.
She gestures, shrugs her shoulders.
She never justifies herself, she is always clear.

I'm screwed, I tell myself again.

To find myself, I lost myself many times.
My journey begins at birth.
I have always been the odd one out,
in my family, in society.
Studying set me free.

Time stands still, Nina tells me about herself.
I discover that she studies, works, and has never loved anyone.

Nina speaks her language and has kept her roots strong.
She has never been ashamed of them.

Nina never felt disadvantaged, even though the world screamed the opposite.

When I was younger, I never wanted to say that I was Roma, but today it is my greatest pride because this is where I come from.

Count, float, black-eyed dancer.
Resistance.
Plotting.
Voice.

Run fast, come home.
What brought you here? My heart.

Tatà.

Appendix B

Between the lights and shadows of the Luna Park by Simonetta Malinverno

Of the world of Luna Park, as we see and remember it, we know only its
beauty. We perceive it when we see it, hear it, and even smell it. The music, the lights, the sounds of a microphone inviting people to get on the rides in a loud voice.
And among the attractions, the wind carries various scents: that of the candy stall,
that of cotton candy, real mobile sandwich bars for short breaks or
dinner before returning home. Their smell surrounds the area of the carousels, perfuming the air,
making everything cheerful and appetizing.
It is at sunset, when evening falls, that the amusement park with its lights takes shape in all its splendor. I always look at it with admiration, it makes me relive some parts of my
life; when I was a child, a teenager, a woman inside the big
amusement park. The feelings I experience are always the same: magic, enchantment, and beauty
Maybe it's the music, maybe it's the lights, maybe it's the beauty of the attractions.
Or simply because that kind of work is in our blood?
Anyway, one thing I am sure of: the work of the carousel operators is truly wonderful, and attention is paid to every detail.
It pains me sometimes to think that, as a job, it is underestimated and undervalued.
There are many stereotypes among people that still confine us, and very often our
work is belittled: we are still seen as people who Father't want to work. We live
in a taboo, but that doesn't mean we're not happy. We've learned to be strong and
shrug off negative judgments, and despite everything, we have been—and continue to be—be - the entertainment for entire generations, both past and present.
The work of carnies and attraction operators is hard. Sometimes only the good side is seen, but it takes a lot of strength, intelligence, passion, and patience. The life of a
traveling show.
Try to imagine yourself grappling with the construction of a puzzle. Well! It's not
that easy: I assure you that among the lights there are also shadows and sacrifices.
Yes, because another thing that fairground workers have to take into account is that a season can go
badly, creating economic problems and leaving entire families in precarious situations. There is rain, bad weather, natural disasters, low earnings, and high expenses to
to bear. Sometimes they go bankrupt.
But the carnies get back up, the carnies hope, and they trust that for a week or even
two weeks it won't rain and the sun will shine. They hope that tomorrow there will be people, lots of people, and that entire groups will repopulate the amusement park. They hope that amid smiles, fun, and music new loves and new memories for tomorrow will be born, and that entire

families, children, and teenagers, will find serenity in a carefree day. They hope for
whispers of youth.
How wonderful it is to spend a whole day at the amusement park, the one near home, which if you Father't visit in a couple of days, it will be gone and you'll have to wait a year for it to come back!
Yes, because the carousel operators' schedules can vary. It depends on the duration of the fair.
When the traveling show group prepares to leave the city in the evening,
men, women, and entire Sinti families work hard to dismantle it piece by piece—it's
like playing with Lego - their carousel, their bread and butter, their life, their livelihood. There is tiredness in their faces and sweat on their foreheads, but also smiles on their lips because it is nice to work in the community, all together, chatting, drinking coffee, a glass of
fresh water, joking, sharing even those hours that become pleasant
lightening the whole atmosphere. And after resting and sleeping a little, they prepare
the caravans for the journey. They all set off in single file and say goodbye with a honk of the horn and a wave of the hand. As the line gradually thins out—some going right and some going left—
a great void remains in the village and who knows, perhaps even some regret.
The carousel operator perseveres and doesn't give up, working even in bad weather and difficult conditions, for better or
bad times. He doesn't give up even when he is left alone. His fellow entertainers
continue their journey for six months of the year. These are the friends of traveling entertainment
traveling show.

Appendix C

Pi ta risal *by Santino Spinelli*

Pi ta risal

Bàr kirkò rovibbè
Opràlë romané khă
lènë di dukhaddipé
andré ni jilò binafèlë,
xoxanò miśtipé
Zungalé divèssë
look biśundipé
mularò rovibbè
Xandivalò sabbé
merribbé barò
na ćhèlë duràlë

Lest we forget

Bitter tears
from Roman eyes,
sources of pain
in an innocent
heart,
tortured feelings
cruel events
unheard cries
dying sobs...
repulsive grin
perennial danger
always looming...

Auschwitz

Muj śukhò
Khià kalé
Vuśt śurdé.
Kwite.
Ilò ćindò
Bi dox
Bi lav
Nikht rovibbé.

Auschwitz

Hollow face
darkened eyes
cold lips.
Silence.
Heart torn apart
breathless
without words
no tears.

Appendix D

The structure of antigypsyism by Luna De Rosa

Appendix E
+ *Rom – Rum* by Ivana Nicolić

Usually this phrase is not written like this, but "rom + rum"...

It's a phrase used by people who dislike us, perhaps because we are nicer, cuddlier, and more likeable.

I have decided to turn negative and discriminatory words into positive ones with a smile.

That's why I'm going to start working on two social media platforms: podcasts and YouTube, where I'll tell you about the Romani and Sinti ethnic minorities from my point of view.

We will talk about history, culture, art, resistance, memory, activism, and above all, we will tell stories of other fantastic Roma and Sinti activists and Gadje (= non-Roma).

Appendix F

The Gypsy Marionettist by Rašhid Nikolić
https://www.instagram.com/reel/DJt3iC3NuzO/?igsh=bmxzdXlyc2ZkbjBs

All right, all right. So today's event will not be a show, but rather a moment together. This is special for me because I will also have the opportunity to show you things that I never normally show during the show. Things like what happens behind the trunk. All right? Let's do this. Now I'll show you a puppet, and then we'll have a question and answer session. Okay? Are you with me? Okay. How's that? Where's the enthusiasm? What do you do when you see a good show? And what do you do when you see a great show?

[Applause from the children]

I make all my puppets by hand, so for all the professions you mentioned earlier, mimes, jugglers, obviously you're not born that way, right? There's a lot of training and preparation behind it, isn't there? In my work in particular, I spend the winter in my carpentry workshop. Do you know what a carpentry workshop is? OK. Yes, exactly. And I build, design, and plan puppets. And this is a real career, so if any of you didn't know what you wanted to do in life until now, this is an idea. Okay? Puppet shows are an Italian tradition, right? The story of Pinocchio tells us that, right? But it's also a tradition in my family, right? Have you ever heard of the Roma people? Well, they are often called by the wrong name, so I'll tell you today, they are often called gypsies. Have you heard the word gypsy before? I'm sure you have. Okay, but I'll tell you today so you can learn it for the future. The word gypsy literally means slave and is a derogatory term that only promotes hatred, okay? The correct word to refer to people of my ethnicity, my people, is the word Romani. Romani in our language means human being. Clear? So what Father't you say? What do you say? Thank you. I'll show you, I'll take this opportunity to show you the Roma flag. Have you seen it before? Wait, I have some clothespins. A white mill. Now yes, now yes, wait. So, I want to tell you about it. In this flag, which is a universal flag, there is the sky, no, is that clear? There is the sky, and the green represents what? The earth, the earth, no? The planet. This, which looks like a wheel, is actually an Indian chakra, an Indian symbol representing the connection that the Roma have with their homeland, India, okay? Very good, the Indian flag also has a similar chakra, we were inspired by that. So this also comes from India and the history of the Romani world. The Romani world was the first, bringing what is an Indian heritage, to bring street performances to Europe. So the first forms of entertainment, hundreds of years ago, were done using shadow puppets, right? You know what I mean? Cardboard, lights, using puppets, using marionettes, using string puppets. So this is a tradition that also comes from the Romani world, which then evolved when it arrived in Europe and became busking. Have you ever heard this term? Busking comes from an English word that means basket, and it has become a term used to mean hat, when you pass the hat, right? A busker is a person who performs street shows, where at the end

of the show the audience, if they want, only if they want, and if they can, can participate in their life by making a donation, okay? And so then there are also street shows, right? So in all the street performances you see, these people are not magicians, they are people who have trained all their lives to be able to bring you something incredible, right? Like the tiger you saw today. To create the tiger, it took me four months, during which I spent two months drawing and designing, and I used images of anatomy. Do you know what anatomy is? The study of the muscles, fibers, and bones inside the tiger's body. To understand how to reproduce its movements, right? And then to build the body, which, as you can see in this case, is not a skeleton, it's an exoskeleton, it's a reproduction of the exterior, right? To build this puppet, okay? Do you have any questions? Tell me?
[Question from the audience]
I mean, how do you get the wood to make the puppets? Do you go and get it somewhere?

Yes, yes. Well, I have a carpentry workshop. So I have two large rooms where I keep all the machinery and tools I've bought over the years while working. And the wood, I buy really big logs, right? Much thicker than these. Which are then cut. You know you can't just take this tree and build something, because the wood has to be dried. Wood naturally absorbs water, so it takes a while. It usually takes a year for every centimeter of wood. So if you have a 5-centimeter plank, how many years does it take to dry? Five. Shall we answer the questions? Ah, what a nice question. Did you hear that? Okay. My grandfather, whose name is Rashid like me. Actually, I'm named after him because he was born before me. When I was a child, we used to spend time together, usually in silence, sitting close to each other, and he would show me how to work with wood with a knife, teaching me not to cut myself and how to carve sculptures out of wood, okay? For me, it wasn't work, it was a way to spend time with my grandfather. Then, when I was 16, I saw a puppet show on the street for the first time. The show was so bad that I thought, 'I can do better than that'. And that's how it started. So I taught myself, which means I tried to learn on my own. I built my first puppets myself. Then I went to puppet school in Ukraine. Now I'm very old, I'm 35. Number... Thank you! To make this puppet, this is the most complex one I have, okay? It's also the most difficult to manipulate because it has so many strings, 23 in fact. It took me six months to make it, okay? Six months of work for two and a half minutes of show. I usually present it on stage with music, but since today is a special occasion, I want to show you how I take it out of the box because it's full of little mechanisms with magnets and things that are used to build the puppet before pulling it up. Okay?
These are the controls. That's what they're called, okay? No, no, the controls aren't the puppet, they're its nervous system. By moving these strings, I can move the puppet's body, okay? So the puppet is there, you haven't seen it yet. So, this puppet is inspired by my sister. My sister Ivana is a very funny, beautiful woman, and she just became a mother a few days ago.

[Applause from the children]

And I'm her uncle. Then, usually, at the end of a show, the street artist comes to the center of the stage, proud of his work, looks the audience in the eye and asks for a donation, which is not a forced economic gesture, you are not obliged to give anything at all, the donation always comes from the possibility and the desire, okay? So today, as you participate in the festival, remember that this is part of the work and the form of street theater. Street performance is one of the ultimate forms of democratic art that exists because, unlike a museum or a theater performance, there is no ticket. The ticket to a street performance is the desire to stay until the end to watch it, and real street artists never leave their hat on the ground from the beginning of the show, but only take it out at the end and only if they have done a good job, okay? When you arrive at a street performance, it is important to respect the artist, as we have done today. The best way to watch the show is to sit on the ground and form a circle, as we have done today, and participate in the show. As soon as you see something that seems to be the result of a lot of work, of many years of work, then give a big round of applause. Even better than applause is cheering. And when you realize that a moment of silence and concentration is needed, then be silent. And when you see another child, someone on the phone, tell them that street theater is a true form of theater and we are not on the street begging or because we cannot get to the theater, but because the square and street theater are our theater and we work with everyone. Thank you.

JEKHIPE

Reclaiming Our Past, Rebuilding Our Future:
New Approaches to Fighting Antigypsyism