
LEFT-WING PROGRESS?
NEO-NATIONALISM AND THE CASE OF ROMANY MIGRANTS IN ITALY

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Introduction

In May 2008 Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi signed a decree declaring the state of emergency in relation to settlements of communities of nomads. Within nine days, an ordinance was issued by the government ordering identification (including fingerprints) of people ‘also of minor age’ living in the ‘nomad camps’. Five weeks later this decree was condemned by a European Parliament resolution stating, ‘collecting fingerprints of Roma […] would clearly constitute an act of direct discrimination based on race and ethnic origin’. Nevertheless, the Italian government continued collecting personal data, and on 27 July 2008 the Minister of Interior, Roberto Maroni, gave a justificatory speech to the Parliament that led to numerous heated criticisms. Maroni’s explicit rhetorical rationale was that the salutary goal of the emergency status was to give identity to those living in the nomad camps lacking ID cards. His clear concern during the speech was to work around the potential accusation of racism by stressing that ‘in the ordinance we never speak about Roma, but only about nomad camps’. Therefore, this is not an ethnicity-based measure, but one which deals with a de facto situation (situazione di fatto), meaning the unauthorised nomad camps.

This series of events in spring and summer 2008 was part of everyday national politics vis-à-vis Roma in contemporary Italy; after the Berlusconi election of 2008 the government seemed to carry out a consistent ‘boundary-making process separating “us” from “them”’. Frequent forced evictions, political rhetoric blaming Roma for creating insecurity, and intolerance in political speeches characterise the political discourse (Loy, 2009, Tavani, 2005). Due to its relevance and its rather grave character, this discourse merits close and critical attention.

The four major topics in such discourse were almost identical to the main themes in Maroni’s speech, namely:

1. Deviance: Roma are said to be dangerous, and often criminals.
2. Nomadism: Roma are said to be vagrants, and for this reason hardly able to adapt to a modern sedentary way of life.
3. Security and legality: Roma are a threat for urban and national security, and the citizenry must be protected in everyday life with substantial policy measures.
4. The necessity of social policies and assistance coordinated between national and local authorities: Roma need to be assisted by social policies that can guarantee social integration in order to prevent deviance from spreading amongst them.

This discourse and its associated policies were part of a deep-rooted xenophobic tradition against Roma in Italy (Colacicchi, 2008; Pisani, 2005) but contained two key innovations that make an analysis of its constitutive elements rather difficult. First, this was one of the first occasions when a usually locality-based issue, i.e. the ‘Gypsy problem’ (Siganis, 2005), became a national issue, paving the way for national measures. Second, the definition of those four major issues cannot be easily identified as deriving from a particular political culture, being neither clearly centre-left or centre-right wing. In other words, this is not simply another instance of a typical right-wing exclusionary idiom opposed to the social integration and multiculturalism traditionally associated with left-wing politics.

Beyond the problematic intersection of anti-immigration sentiments and the anti-Roma legacy in Italian policies, a central feature of approaches to Roma in Italy has been the trope of nomadism. Nando Siganis (2003) has shown how the assumption of nomadism underpinning regional policies was used to label Roma fleeing Kosovo in the 1990s as nomads and keep...
LEFT-WING PROGRESS?

them as "enemies", not "strangers" (ibid., 76), excluding them into camps." Migration is thus, in reference to the Roma, reframed as a putatively cultural practice normalization.

In this chapter I will analyse a specific case of the relationship between migration and the political left: the management by the Tuscan council of the immigration of Roma. My question is the following: to what extent since the arrival of Romany migrants has the left-wing regional council been able to recognize Roma difference while treating them equally and granting them equal rights? I will show how the legacy of radically exclusionary policies concerning Romany migrants by the Italian and, to a certain extent, the European left, has been accompanied by a 'merciful' ethno-nationalist idiom. In this way, the current nationalist idiom, which consists of two overlapping discourses—of social integration and deviance—can be seen to rest on a hazy and incoherent category of 'nomads'.

The left and the Roma in Italy

Studies focusing on the material living conditions of the Roma and their position in the symbolic social hierarchy in the cities of Bologna (Però, 1999), Rome (Clough Martinaro, 2005) and Florence (Colacich, 1996; Sceneto, 1997) demonstrate a familiar pattern from the end of the 1980s—

THE GYPSY 'MENACE'

We have to begin sending people back [to their country of origin] otherwise it won't be possible to cope with the issue [of security] in Turin, Rome and Milan. [...] If one country wants to stay in Europe, it has to respect the rules. It [Europe] cannot open all our doors (buco porti) and send people from one country to the other. ('Sicurezza: Veltroni cerca l' alleanza via al rimpianto di nessuno ce la fà, La Repubblica, 31 Ottobre 2007).

These kinds of extraordinary statements from a left-wing mayor have to be understood in the long-term development of policies towards Roma.

The first significant modern influx of Roma to Italy occurred in the second half of the 1970s, when the crisis of the Yugoslav economic model began to be evident. Just a few years previously the first attempts to regulate immigration had been implemented at a local level. Due to the novelty of this phenomenon, and the related lack of institutional experience to face it, there has never been an integrated national policy vis-à-vis Roma. Instead, since the mid-1980s, a number of regional laws have been passed. Almost always these the laws have been designed to incorporate knowledge of Romany social life provided by 'experts', i.e. civil society groups working with Roma, more often referred to as 'Gypsies' (Zingari) and 'nomads'.

These organizations draw on a culture of dealing with the Roma that has a long history in Italy. In the introduction to his social history of the education of Roma in Italy, historian Luca Bravi (2009) argues that 'today, the old stereotypes about Roma are still the same as those that brought Rome into the periphery of Auschwitz many "Gypsies" are still viewed as strangers characterized by a nomadic character, by asocial behaviors, and by theft considered as a way of life' (ibid., 17). The Italian system of education has historically reserved a special position for Roma and Sinti, with a mixture of inclusionary and exclusionary policies (ibid). Indeed, while education has traditionally been one of the most important grounds of dispute between the two major political forces, i.e. the Christian Democrats (DC party—Democrazia Cristiana) and the Communists (PCI party—Partito Comunista Italiano), traditionally the education of Roma and Sinti has been inspired by ideologies drawn from both political forces. This may explain why educational policies for the Roma have never been completely inclusive or not completely exclusionary activities.

It is within such a well-rooted tradition—positioned equidistantly between left-wing and Christian Democrat politics—that the most influential organization on the education of Roma and Sinti, Opera Nomadi (Charitable Organisation for Nomads—ON), operated. In particular, as the
left-wing progress

major consultant of regional councils for drafting regional laws on Roma, it
contributed significantly to coin the idiom with which Roma were
viewed and which circulated in the first legislative texts on them. The first
efforts of ON aimed to provide a place where 'nomads' could live and
regularly attend classes in schools. These places, called 'area natale' (stop areas) or
'centri natale' (stop centres), started to appear in the peripheries of big
cities in the late 1960s. They were conceived as places where 'nomads' could come
to a halt anywhere in the country during their travels, and in doing so not
lose their own 'culture'. 'Culture' was viewed by ON as:

A set of rites, customs, uses, elaborated within an idealised past. These elements
were considered at risk of extinction in industrial and capitalist society. This was
a culture-tradition which [could be seen] to be either the cause of the 'delay' [in the
process of development] of Roma or as a system from which to choose which
elements to preserve and which to reject (Bravi and Signori, 2007: 865; my
translation).

To dig deeper into the links between left-wing politics and Romany
migrants, I will narrow my focus here to Tuscany and its main city Florence,
where the camp population of Roma in 1994 was about 1,100, but had
diminished to about 600 in 2006. Since 1970, the year when Italian regions
became governed by elected administrative bodies, Tuscany has been consis-
tently ruled by the left (Socialists - PSI, Communists - PCI, and, later,
Social Democrats - PDS/DS).12

The end of the 1980s: Tuscany and its 'nomads'

As far as Tuscany is concerned, the 'social Catholicism' within which ON's
activities were carried out was also one of the main ideological references
of the first policies concerning Roma. The major leader of the 'Tuscan'
domination of 'social Catholicism' is Ernesto La Pira, who has twice been
mayor of Florence, from 1950 to 1956, and from 1960 to 1964, and a prominent
figure in the Italian constituent assembly (assemblea costituente).13 His
approach was based on political values such as non-violence, internationalism,
social policy for the poor and ecumenism, and his political affiliation
has always been that of the Christian Democrats. It is in this tradition, which
can be called 'social Catholicism', that the first attempts to face the 'proble-
matic Zigrani' in Tuscany were carried out.

In April 1987, a regional councillor, Giancarlo Niccoli, belonging to the
'Lapidian' current, proposed a law (17/88), which was entitled 'Interventions

1. To promote the implementation of the camps (campeggi stabiliti) for sedentary
people (residenti stabilimenti) and transit areas (aree di transito) (for those who travel), and
set up health and social services for the guests who are staying.
2. To safeguard the positive values of the nomadic culture, and especially folk arts
and crafts, through:
   - Ad hoc initiatives aimed at the development and production of handmade
goods;
   - Financial support for the creation of handicraft work within the camp.
3. To provide school education for persons below eighteen years-old, and combat
illiteracy.

After defining the problems and declaring the intention to solve them,
Niccoli concluded his speech by alluding to the 'civic tradition which has
always characterised Tuscany', underlining the importance of 'reception'
(recezione) as a distinctive value of their tradition (quoted in Staffoli 1995:
43; my translation). In the text it was never mentioned that the Roma were
migrants and foreigners. Rather, the law was framed within a discourse on
'nomads'. It is important to analyse this discourse and its political con-
text, considering both the particular text of the law and the debates around
its approval.

Before proposing the bill, and in order to improve the proposed text, the
regional council commission dealing with 'Health and Social Care' held
consultations with some civil society organisations that were experienced in
the field, having dealt previously with problems involving 'nomads'. The
whole discussion was articulated in view of a clear goal: to allow the cultural
preservation of this 'ethnic', through 1. Education, 2. Housing and 3. Social services (Regione Toscana, 1987). The rationale of the discussion was to reinforce the legitimacy of the incommensurable dichotomy between a sedentary culture or way of life and a nomadic culture, between us/Tuscans and them/nomads. That such a dichotomy existed was taken as unquestioned conventional wisdom by all participants in the meeting. The following dialogue between one of the consultants, who criticises the text of the law for not underlining the difference between our and their lifestyles, and the president of the commission, is instructive:

CONSULTANT: One of the fundamental dimensions of the Gypsy way of life is a nomadic style. It is important to stress this, because [...] there are [in the text of the law] some elements in favor of those who decide not to be nomadic anymore, and in this way it falls to give enough guarantees to those who are still nomadic. The latter do not carry out a nomadic way of life just because they have not reached a higher degree of maturity, but because this lifestyle belongs to a fundamental dimension of their personal (ibid: 14).

The commission president then attempted to clarify what the consultant had just said:

PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION: This law is a product of our culture, and it could not be otherwise. Thus, drawing on this consideration, we can say that the fact that it is a product of our culture does not mean that it should overwhelm other cultures which are currently in our region (ibid: 28).

This dialogue suggests a deep irreconcilable difference in patterns of behaviour between Rome and non-Roma. It could thus be argued that what was being represented was an 'insurmountable barrier' to do what comes naturally to humans, in principle, namely, communicating (Stolcke, 1995: 8). A further element of such a 'barrier' is its sense of a privileged position, of distance; Rome was not consulted beforehand, nor were they present during these discussions.

And not did the law provide any real help for the Roma. In the autumn of 1987, a roadblock was organised by some of the inhabitants of Castello, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Florence. The protest was against about a hundred people who were driving around without a fixed place to stay, just living in damaged caravans (Colacchi, 1996). On 13 October 1987, the local authorities ordered 'the transfer of those nomads to an open-air area owned by the local council located in Olmatelli Street, at the very edge of the city'. A few months later the us/them dichotomy was concretised when the municipality began to enclose the area with a thick, high permanent wall, and caravans and containers started to appear inside. All this was done on the basis of the 1987 law.

THE GYPSY MENACE

The political crisis that began after Tito died in 1980 and finally brought Yugoslavia to its collapse in the early 1990s had a significant impact on the Florentine camps. Many Roma fleeing persecution in both the Bosnian and the Kosovo war entered Italy in order to join their relatives who had migrated westward since the mid-1970s. Those who arrived in Florence found a shelter in the Poderaccio area, the only non-fenced place in the city in which they could stay, although in very precarious material conditions. This migration led to a new attempt to legislate for Romany difference, with a law designed on the basis of dedicated empirical investigations carried out by an influential think-tank, the Fondazione Michelucci, a major consultant of the regional council who were employed at this time to investigate conditions in the Roma camps. Michelucci's key finding was that the Roma in Florence were not in fact nomads. Only a handful of the Roma in Tuscany were still pursuing a nomadic way of life (Maretti et al., 1993), and as a result a new bill concerning Roma should be proposed.

The 75/1995 regional law, abrogating the previous one, was entitled 'Interventions for the Roma and Sinti People(s). The most important difference with the previous law was the linguistic shift from places of transit (camps) or 'furnished transit areas' to places of permanent residence ('equipped residential areas') (Area attrezzata per il tranzit and Area attrezzata residenziale). Councillors began to ask for a census of the population living in the camps. A group of them decided to go and visit the camps in order to 'concretely implement projects which could answer to the needs of the inhabitants of the camps' (Rossi, 1996:94). The Michelucci research was an incisive critique of the camp as a housing solution for the Roma. The entire document was organised around a binomial principle: on one side there is 'Romany culture' (cultura rom), and on the other there is 'urbanism', which can either draw on a refusal (offesa) or reception (accoglienza) by the city's inhabitants. The researchers' agenda was to demonstrate empirically that the camps were not an appropriate housing solution, because they did not fit 'Romany culture'. Stemming from this analysis the researchers proposed that little houses be constructed for the Roma, not at the margins of urban areas but within them. Different pa-
terms of houses were proposed according to the exigencies of the local host society and the 'Romany culture'. The research represented the first attempt to authentically understand the Roma's requests and claims; and, in effect, the 75/1995 law partially removed the barrier between Romany immigrants and regional authorities: although the idiom of nomadism was used in the first law it is not the only one used in the new law. However, the text of the 1995 law did not shift the idiom away from the culturalist one of the 1987 law, and this was the most fundamental element of continuity between the first and the second law. A closer look at the 1995 law will illustrate this point in detail.

The preamble to law 75/1995 states in its first article:

This law dictates the norms for the preservation of Romany cultural patrimony and of Roma and Sinti identity, in order to facilitate the communication between cultures, to grant the right to a nomadic life, to religious practice, to stop and to stay within the regional territory. Moreover the right to enjoy access to social, health and school services is granted.

Since the influential Michelucci Foundation stressed the importance of adequate housing solutions for 'Gypsy culture', this element can be seen as attaching a new importance to the territorial dimension. Therefore, in the political construction of the Romany issue 'culture' assumes a strictly territory-based meaning. In other words: while the 1987 law was wrong in identifying all Roma as nomads (as the Michelucci research revealed); in the 1995 law it is still upon differences of territorial and housing habits from the majority population that the 'Romany culture' is assumed to be based.

In sum, the passage between the first and the second law shows that the idiom with which Romany migrants were framed by the left-wing Tuscan authorities remained predicated upon 'culturalism fundamentalism' (Stolcke, 1995). In the first law (17/1988), the culturalist idiom was exclusively related to nomadism, and in the second law (75/1995) it was still related to the link between people and territory. Specifically housing habits recognized as somehow peculiar and partially different from the ones of the local society/culture.

And such official discourse, of course, had its vernacular concomitant. The Florentine media discourse of that period was mainly focused on the increased number of Roma fleeing the Yugoslav conflicts and settling in the Florentine camps. In particular, local committees of citizens protesting against the presence of the camps were a recurrent and predominant topic in the local press.22 The idioms deployed in newspapers to define the presence of Roma and the reasons for the necessity of evicting them from the municipal territory was very close to that used in the two regional laws. While the law said 'they are different, therefore their culture should be protected', the citizens' committees appeared to be simply citing the law in their own terms, saying 'they are different, therefore they should either adapt to our rules or leave our land'.

Left-wing policy and its legacy: 'exclusive inclusion'?

In this way, the rigid cultural boundaries drawn by the first and second laws can be seen as the major sources of today's popular understanding of social integration of Romany migrants in Florence. In 2000 a new law was passed (2/2000) which aimed at:

safeguarding identity and the social development of Roma and Sinti in order to facilitate communication between cultures, to grant the right of nomadism, of religion, as well as the right to stop and to stay within the regional territory accessing social, healthcare and school services.

The 2000 law allowed Roma to access social housing, and to be part of a social integration project which has provided a way to autonomy and recognition to about 110 Roma within the regional territory (Sciocia, 2009: 157). This law became the major framework within which to carry out publication. Yet what happened to the camps? On the basis of the new law, on 25 September 2001, an order was approved planning the restructuring of Poderaccio in order to relocate some families living in the shanty nearby to the new site. Relocation had to happen according to three main criteria: historic factors, i.e. the presence of individual Roma at certain key moments of the areas social life; holding a permit of residence (valid so long as a majority of each household had this), and sending children to school. In addition, there were other, less formal, criteria, which were raised once placement interviews with families started to be held.

In order to illustrate the logic by which the authorities operated, I transcribe here parts of a long meeting I had with Marco in spring 2007, a district-level civil servant responsible for Romany issues, amongst other matters. Marco is an active member of the Democratic Party (PD), the major left-wing national party and the most powerful in Florence. During our meeting, Marco explained to me the ways in which he managed the relocation of the people from Poderaccio.
LEFT-WING PROGRESS

The last census, carried out in 2002, reported 147 people living there. At the moment of filling-up the new wooden houses, I found in front of me 190 people. So, our decisions have been the following three:

1. To fill up the thirty available houses with thirty families.
2. To ask the regional council to help, with its other projects of social inclusion and reception. This allowed us to place six families in houses.
3. We decided not to host three families, to whom we offered a financial donation.

One of them refused our donation.

We took those three interventions without any ethnic discrimination (we didn’t care whether they were Ashkaljita, Sinti, Roma, Macedonians...). I don’t care about all that. I operate with administrative criteria.

I operated a very analytical analysis of the single families, exactly because there were surplus people, almost forty surplus people. In November 2005 there was the transfer of people to the new second village. I am for multiculturalism. I don’t have cultural prejudices, but I am severe in the imposition of rules. I have to say that some cultural approaches arrive at providing an excess of assistance (assistanza superflua). Many associations hurt the Roma. A university professor was telling me that Roma understand rights but don’t understand duties. There is no human being who understands rights without understanding duties. That professor was yelling at me because I was treating them [Roma] as citizens. But are they B-series citizens?

Marco continues with his position regarding general principles, and introduces a category that will subsequently be important in the analysis, i.e., ‘unequal rights’.

There is a certain cultural resistance by Roma to accept the rules. I explain [to them] that rules are universal: ‘You are citizens just like the others’. But I believe in the unequal right. I don’t think like Veltrini [the mayor of Rome] who draws on the principle of equality of possibilities. Yet, I agree, but according to my view there are subjects who don’t start from where the others start, but from a much lower stage—due to their biographies, due to abandon. Therefore, they should have different treatment than other citizens, not in a discriminatory sense, but in a positive one.

Here, Marco is talking about rights and duties which, together with national identification, are the other pillars of belonging in the nation state. Rights and duties are, in the civil servant’s point of view, the logical reason behind the different treatment of Roma in comparison with any other subjects with whom local authorities deal or have dealt. This treatment is considered by Marco not to be discriminatory (i.e., exclusionary). However, when our conversation shifts from ideas and principles to practice, he clarifies what, a minute before, he called ‘unequal rights’.

THE GYPSY ‘MENACE’

If a civil servant follows a family for twelve years (follows in terms of providing social care), after which that family does no more anything, and the result of those twelve years is that the family sits down and waits for help. I come and I say: ‘Stop!’ I say ‘No!’ to the excess of assistance people must act by themselves [lavoro da fare]. This is real welfare [i.e., when people act by themselves]. I give you an example. The assistance period lasts one year, and then we propose [...] a project [...] well, Roma too must do something! I found you [i.e., Roma] a job, and what do you do? You abandon it only because you live at ten km away from your workplace? You can’t do this! Some of them [Roma] abandon their jobs. Of course, I understand, they are nomad people! I do understand this. But there are also such great workers among Roma.

As is explicit in the last two excerpts, my interlocutor was following a particular reasoning: Roma are disadvantaged for reasons that do not come from them; therefore they must be helped. And if they don’t do anything to help themselves this is because of their way of life: they are nomads. Yet, they also have to do something [devono fare]. The logic goes from inclusionary statements to exclusionary ones with a rather surprising simplicity, as if its reasoning—which he told me in a very relaxed atmosphere and as if he had explained it to many people before me—was regarded as self-evident.

It is noteworthy that this ‘exclusive inclusion’—i.e., the logic of making Roma part of the society only until the point that cultural barriers become too great—was the leitmotiv of every interview I carried out. To universal civic rights, civil servants impose particularistic cultural barriers. And this logic is at work to keep, maintain, and perpetuate housing isolation and marginalisation. Marco’s inclusionary principle therefore did not overcome ‘cultural fundamentalism’ and the ‘culturalist’ stance, which stresses that the culture to which I am said or claim to belong defines my essence. Cultures (static, finite and bounded ethnolinguistic bloc labelled ‘French’, ‘Nuer’ and so on) determine individual and collective identities, and the subject’s place in social and political schemas (Grillo, 2003: 160).

In 2007 Olmatello camp hosted 137 persons, and Poderaccio about 500 persons. All the inhabitants of the camp I regularly met told me about the excessive heat in summer and the excessive cold in winter; about their continuous fear of being evicted, especially families with little children, who had been told by state and local police that ‘eviction might happen in the next few days’. The Olmatello camp had not been the object of intervention—not even after the 2000 law. Notwithstanding the materially precarious conditions there, the major concern of my interlocutors in the local
LEFT-WING PROGRESS?

Once I was stuck by something a Roma living in a camp told me: He said: 'If I don't get a job, I will go away,' and he left for Germany. I would never be able to leave like that, from one day to the next. This is the point: maybe they have this travelling sense (sensa gennaio) in their blood, according to which they can easily travel.

Conclusion: Neo-nationalism and the left in Europe

Studies on the cultural basis of the European Union project have revealed a strong process of othering that is predicated on nationalist premises. In particular, commenting on the efforts carried out by EU officers to create a European symbolism in order to bring the activities of Brussels offices closer to the citizens of the Member States, Shore (2006) writes:

What is striking about these EU culture-building initiatives is the way they echo many of the techniques and methods used by nationalist elites in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to forge Europe's existing Nation States [...] — precisely the model that EU advocates claim they are seeking to transcend. (2006: 711–12).

Within the more general context of transnationalism and globalisation, Gingrich and Banks (2006) argue that it is the EU's own systematic ambivalence of partially being a protective barrier against, as much as partially being a tool for and product of globalisation that therefore sets the systemic and structural standards for neo-nationalist's agency (2006: 20). This new phenomenon is rather miscellaneous, and does not necessarily combine state and nation as the zone of homogeneity, as was the case in the classic definition of nationalism proposed by Gellner (1983). Rather than a new ideology, neo-nationalism is a social phenomenon involving new forms of community-making along national or regional lines, predicated on a reformulation of the idioms for identifications against the background of uncertainties caused by globalisation.

Studies focusing on the political right have shown a rise of racist stances vis-à-vis migrants that are imbued with the language of culture (Stöckke, 1995; Holmes, 2000; Stacul, 2006). Research on the other side of the political spectrum, i.e. the left, has so far been less intense. However Pêro (2006) uncovered the presence of a 'non-integrating multiculturalism' (Brah, 1996) in the mainstream left's attitudes towards migrants in Europe.

In a later work, the author suggests that even so-called progressive forces are largely operating within an exclusionary logic, failing to extend what remains of their egalitarian and universalist principles beyond the narrow boundaries of their own national "imagined community" (Pêro, 2007: 142). By setting his ethnography in the 'red city' of Bologna, the author sets his study in a privileged context. Italy, in which to analyse the changes in the egalitarian side of the political spectrum. What happened that brought the powerful Italian Left to adopt exclusionary policies appears to be that, historically, the European left has shifted from class-based definitions of migrants (in the 1960s and 1970s) to culture- or ethnicity-based definitions (Pêro, 2006; 2007). Certainly, notwithstanding the long tradition of political participation and class-based political struggles of the Florentine left, with the arrival of new immigrants' at the end of the 1980s this sense of class belonging lost its appeal. This was accompanied by a backlash against a serious politics of equality of socio-economic conditions and political rights, and an uncritical embrace of a neo-liberal agenda.

By making Roma objects whose culture was to be protected, the left-wing Tuscan regional council since the late 1980s planned and brought into being two areas at the extreme periphery of the town in which Romany migrants lived and some still live. This analysis has attempted to unmask the muted and implicit ethno-nationalist stance underpinning these social policies: reorienting people to such places is the material reflection of thinking about them as intrinsically outsiders vis-a-vis 'our own culture', be that Christianity, sedentary habits, or 'the civic tradition of Tuscan'. This reinforces intra-national boundaries that seem to be a common trope in Italian society—the 'neo-localism' that anthropologist Jaro Stacul (2006) has identified as the local main source of modern populist politics.

And if this is correct, responsibility for the popularity and persuasive force of the Berlusconi government's initiatives with which I began this paper lies in places unexpected and formally opposed to his conservative forces.