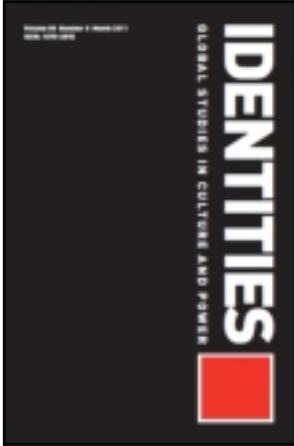


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## Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gide20>

### Abnormalising minorities. The state and expert knowledge addressing the Roma in Italy

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Published online: 09 Dec 2013.

To cite this article: Giovanni Picker & Gabriele Roccheggiani (2014) Abnormalising minorities. The state and expert knowledge addressing the Roma in Italy, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 21:2, 185-201, DOI: [10.1080/1070289X.2013.854719](https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2013.854719)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2013.854719>

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## **Abnormalising minorities. The state and expert knowledge addressing the Roma in Italy**

Giovanni Picker and Gabriele Roccheggiani

*(Received 7 August 2012)*

This article expands the research on abnormalisation and the construction of social deviance of minorities. It focuses on the relationships between state practices, policies and expert knowledge addressing the Roma in Italy; it does so by first contextualising recent ethnographic findings on Turin authorities' social inclusion practices addressing Roma within the history of national and regional policies for Roma; it then contextualises those policies within the history of expert knowledge about Roma. Unlike what other studies on abnormalisation suggest, we argue that the abnormalisation of Roma in Italy is not primarily predicated upon the idea that they are at present unfit to follow the norms of the majority; rather, it stays upon a historically rooted representation of Roma oscillating between the poles of potential re-educability and potential dangerousness. In the conclusion we encourage further comparative research on abnormalisation, especially including practices and knowledge addressing other European minorities such as the Jews.

**Keywords:** abnormalisation; minorities; nomadness; nomadism; Roma; Italy

### **Introduction**

States may construct minorities not only as different from the majority, but also as 'abnormal' and 'deviant'. Focusing on the case of the Netherlands and Belgium respectively, Rath (1991) and Blommaert and Vershueren (1998) talked about 'minoritisation' and 'abnormalisation' of immigrants, pointing out that media and political discourses construct them mainly as deviant with respect to a norm. Similarly, socio-anthropological studies of Western European politics have shown that conservative governments and single politicians often discursively downplay migrants' conditions of material deprivation, linking migrants' national belonging and social deviance (Stolcke 1995, Wright 1998, Hannerz 1999, Grillo 2003). And more comprehensive studies on migration and ethnicity in Europe in the 1990s showed a resurgence of xenophobia and racism that criminalised migrants by stressing allegedly essential cultural traits (Baumgartl and Favell 1995, Wiewiorka 1995, Balibar 2001). More recently Palidda (2010) has shown that in the 2000s, US and Western European state agencies follow a racialising logic in constructing migrants as criminals by enacting prohibitionist legislation and promoting police practices that rely on the increasingly blurred

distinction between administrative and penal measures. Finally, Kuhelj (2011) accounted for the recent right-wing outburst in Central and Eastern Europe of state nationalism and xenophobia against ‘new minorities’, the Jews and the Roma, pointing out that ‘governments are also attacking the constitutional guaranteed rights and freedoms of [...] other social groups who do not fit the organic ethnic and culturally conservative concept of the nation’ (Kuhelj 2011, p. 273; see also Kalb 2011, Stewart 2012). Many of these studies draw on Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’ to explain the normalising disciplinary logic of state actions vis-à-vis minorities that concomitantly construct social deviance.

From a different perspective, socio-psychological research has criticised state-centred studies on abnormalisation and deviance, by underlining the fact that they ‘are very similar to Foucault’s (1977) analyses of the normalising effects of discursive regimes *in which there is little room for human agency and debate*’ (Verkuyten 2001, p. 258; emphasis added). Although taking into account the importance of the sociopolitical and ideological context, the notion of ‘abnormalisation’ of ethnic minorities is then defined more as the result of personal interactions than of state-led actions (see also Chiang 2010). This view is evident in Țileaga (2006, 2007) who focuses on the case of the Roma, discussing the derogatory essential moral qualities that are ascribed to them by middle-class Romanians, as part of a process of ‘dehumanizing the other’ (2006, p. 22).

Both these approaches – state-centred and people-centred – have underlined that ‘abnormalisation’ and ‘social deviance’ stem from majority’s clear representations of minorities as static groups embodying an essential ‘ethnic difference’ which majorities variously frame and define. However, it is within a space of ambiguity constituted by the interactions of juridical procedures and psycho-medical expert knowledge, rather than in the representation of a clear-cut and ultimate difference, that the historical origins of the notion of ‘abnormal’ are to be found. Foucault (2003) in his 1974–1975 series of lectures focused on the late nineteenth century’s emergent construction of ‘the abnormal’, without invoking the notion of governmentality.

According to the philosopher, while previous psychologico-medical discourse was concerned with madness, and earlier juridical discourse focused on classic juridical theory, which punished only after having found the real motive of the crime, the medico-juridical discourse focused on ‘an irregularity in relation to a norm that must be at the same time a pathological dysfunction in relation to the normal’ (Foucault 2003, p. 163). The convergence of psycho-medical and juridical discourses was made possible by the emergence of the notion of ‘perversity’, which, Foucault explained, ‘functioned as switch point (*échangeur*)’, enabling ‘medical notions to function in the field of juridical power and, conversely, juridical notions to function in the medicine’s sphere of competence. [...] and the weaker it [was] epistemologically, the better it function[ed]’ (Foucault 2003, p. 33).

By identifying in Italian local authorities’ practices and in national and regional policies an ambivalent approach to Roma that constructs material and

representational spaces oscillating simultaneously between the two polarisations of inclusion and exclusion, and alleged danger and cultural protection, in this article we argue that the norm in relation to which Roma are being 'abnormalised' is sedentariness. We trace this process of abnormalisation back to the origins of expert knowledge on Roma and show that abnormalisation is ultimately predicated upon a representation of Roma as constantly *potentially* re-educable and *potentially* dangerous. We follow a twofold methodology, namely ethnography and genealogy. We first ethnographically discuss local authorities' practices vis-à-vis Romani migrants in contemporary Turin. We then trace a double genealogy, on the one hand examining the regional policy framework that imposed the limits of municipal employees' actions; on the other hand dissecting the expert knowledge which the regional policy framework, and, in turn, municipal employees' actions, drew upon.

### **Between inclusion and exclusion. Local authorities' practices vis-à-vis Roma in Turin**

The Roma in Italy are estimated to be about 170,000, somewhat less than 0.3% of the national population, and they do not enjoy the status of an ethnic or linguistic minority.<sup>1</sup> Due to the fact that the majority of Roma live in housing conditions that are worse than those of the majority (FRA and RAXEN 2009), state and local approaches to them are relatively more significant in determining their living conditions. Turin, the main city of the north-western region of Piedmont, has a population of 909,000. Romani migrants amount to roughly 2500 people, about 0.2% of the urban population. Their main nationalities are Romanian (estimated to be 1500 people),<sup>2</sup> and Bosnian and Serbian (about 1000 people). About 500 Romanian Roma, who are European Union (EU) citizens and thus legally living in Italy, reside in two illegal settlements (slums) of precarious shacks across the river Stura, which delimits the northern urban perimeter. In the late 1990s, they occupied that piece of land because they were poor and available housing in the city was relatively expensive.

In Turin, newly arrived migrants with little capital are unlikely to be able to afford any kind of rented housing, unless in very overcrowded conditions. While from 1995 to 2004 the number of non-EU applicants for Social Housing in Turin increased from 17.2% to 26.4%, financial resources allocated to Social Housing construction during the 1990s dropped by 50%, and during the 2000s by 30% (Governa and Saccomani 2009, pp. 398–399). Moreover, as the rate of home ownership in Italy has climbed to 78% of the entire housing stock, there are almost no available low-budget renting options beyond social housing.

The two slums in which Romanian Roma today live are close to a fenced camp. In 2004, the municipality built the camp for Romani families who in the mid-1970s arrived in Turin from Yugoslavia, and many of whom continue to be undocumented because of Italy's complex and ever changing bureaucratic requirements. However, they are allowed to legally stay in Italy provided they

reside in the fenced camp, which currently hosts about 200 people. The legal camp for Yugoslav Roma and the two illegal slums where Romanian Roma live are constantly monitored and assisted by two municipal offices, the Nomadism and Emergency Settlements Office, i.e. a division of the Social Work and Social Service Department, and the Nomad Patrols, i.e. a special section of the municipal police with a workforce of 24 policemen. The ethnographic material was collected through a 6-month fieldwork in 2010, carrying out participant observation and 18 semi-structured interviews with civil servants and NGO activists working for the people living in the camp and the slum.<sup>3</sup>

### ***‘Nomads’ housing between legality and authorisation***

Since the 1970s, municipal employees in Turin have been governing Italian and foreign Roma – holding and not holding legal papers – defining them indiscriminately as nomads. In the 1970s the notion of ‘nomads’ was the only idiom that local policymakers used to identify both Italian Sinti and recently arrived groups of Yugoslav Roma (Picker 2013a). The municipal *Nomadism* and Emergency Settlement Office (Ufficio Nomadismo e Insediamenti di Emergenza) and the *Nomads* Patrols (Pattuglie Nomadi) were both founded in 1982, at a time when the local section of the national charity *Nomads* Work (Opera Nomadi) set up the first equipped areas for nomads.<sup>4</sup> Between 1979 and 1991, the city council set up three camps for ‘Yugoslav nomads’ in different periphery areas; one of the camps was built in 1998 close to the Stura River. Following the negotiation between *Nomads* Work and the regional council, the regional law ‘Interventions in favour of the Gypsy population’ passed in 1993, imposing the construction of equipped camping areas in order to socially integrate the ‘Gypsy population’. One of these areas was built in 2004 to replace the camp built in 1998 close to the river Stura. The regional law functioned and still functions as the main institutional umbrella for measures addressing Roma in Turin, providing guidelines and financial support for several public and private social inclusion projects.

In 2010, the aim of the Nomadism Office was ‘to take these people [i.e. slum dwellers] out of the slums and to insert them in housing’, in the words of Sara,<sup>5</sup> the person responsible for the Office activities in the slums. In order to reach this aim, the Office provided Roma mainly with work bursary (*borse lavoro*) covering the first six monthly salaries of a new Romani employee, on the condition that afterwards the employer had to seriously consider hiring the new Romani worker. Money came either from Regional tenders or projects funded by the EU. However, the success rate of these social inclusion measures was very low, which Sara attributed to the current European financial crisis:

We are working on a project, which two years ago was financed by the Ministry of Labour. We budgeted money to provide social housing to fifty Romanian Romani families living in the two slums. However, now we can manage only to offer

housing to twenty families, because, due to the current financial crisis, many of their members lost their jobs, and without jobs, they cannot pay the rent.

The head of the Nomad Patrols described their activities in the Yugoslav Romani camp:

We keep track of everything happening in the *authorised* camps and in *non-authorised* slums. Our everyday activity aims to check if there are non-authorised persons in those sites. We usually search cars, and potential criminal activities. Our priority is prevention, because this means being able to intervene beforehand. In this way, we do not allow crimes to be committed, or at least we make crimes less likely to be committed. We prioritize an in-depth knowledge of that world. All policemen working in the slums are professionals who know personally those who live in the slums, they call them by name and they chat regularly. There is a reciprocal respect with those *nomads*.

In this interview along with other dialogues and discussions with municipal employees, the idiom of authorisation was used to describe those areas, such as non-authorised slums (other times called 'spontaneous sites'), rather than the idiom of lawfulness, using for example 'illegal slums'.<sup>6</sup> The choice of deploying the idiom of authorisation rather than the one of lawfulness reveals one dilemma and one constraint that characterise all institutional practices vis-à-vis Roma in Turin.

The dilemma, as perceived within the two institutions that collaborate on a daily basis, is that they allow three generations of undocumented former Yugoslav citizens to live in the 'authorised camps' and EU citizens to live in 'unauthorised slums'. Indeed, calling the slums illegal would in the eyes of the public opinion delegitimise all the social work that the municipal employees were carrying out on a daily basis. At the same time, by avoiding the idiom of legality, authorities contribute to perpetuate the existence of places of radical exclusion at the extreme outskirts of the city. This was one of the main concerns of Sara and of her colleagues, who while talking to us made often reference to the imaginary voice of the public opinion: 'why spending public money for granting services in areas which according to the existing laws should simply be removed?' In order to solve this dilemma, they opted to adopt the safe terminology of authorisation, 'thus keeping', they often told us, 'a low profile when it comes to publicising our work in the unauthorised slums'.

The result of this kind of management is that those living in 'authorised camps' are allowed to stay in the country as long as they don't leave those camps, and those living in 'unauthorised slums' are allowed to stay there although the slums are illegal.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the ambivalence between measures towards inclusion having a low success rate on the one hand, and securing the presence of Roma in places of radical exclusion on the other hand. The upshot of blurring is that securing their isolation and exclusion from the majority society is possible thanks to the idiom of authorisation substituting for that of legality. This codified system

of naming is widespread in Italy. ‘Authorised camps’ and ‘unauthorised’ shacks or slums are everyday institutional expressions, a taken for granted lexicon, routinely used to define Roma settlements throughout the country.

For municipal councillors, the strategy to deal with that dilemma was to refer to the ‘state of emergency in relation to nomad communities’, with which in May 2008 the government gave special powers to the prefects of Milan, Rome and Naples. Indeed, in the summer of 2009 the government included the extension of special powers to the prefects of Turin and Venice. In 2010 when we were interviewing municipal employees, they often mentioned the prefect’s special powers and the conspicuous funding available to the prefect. Yet in the summer of 2010 the prefect of Turin had carried out no action vis-à-vis ‘nomad communities’.

### *Nomadness*

To our question about the illegality of the conditions in which Roma were living, the municipal councillor in charge of police affairs replied:

This is a very big problem. So big, that in 2009 the government gave special powers to our prefect in order to face this problem. Placing the *nomads* (*collocare i nomadi*) is a very big problem. There are no municipalities near Turin that have been given their support for receiving even few dozens of *nomad* families. It’s difficult to evict people living in non-authorised camps, because there is no possibility of relocation.

The excerpt quoted shows a way of defining the ‘problem’ that was recurrent in several of our dialogues and encounters, namely referring to nomadism. More precisely, there was a rooted understanding among Turin authorities according to which, even though Romanian and Yugoslav Roma displayed no trait of an itinerant or vagrant way of life, they nevertheless were nomads. Authorities often faced the exceptional illegal conditions under which Roma in Turinese settlements had been living for over 40 years by attributing institutional responsibility to the national government and to the current State of Emergency. Yet authorities attributed the real cause of that illegal condition to Roma’s alleged nomadism. We argue that authorities’ understanding of nomadism would better be defined as *nomadness*, namely an a-historical and even quasi-metaphysical characterisation that Roma, no matter their actual way of life, their citizenship and their legal status, would allegedly bear.

The keeping of Romanian citizens in illegal slums and allowing undocumented Yugoslav citizens in legal camps are the results and simultaneously the perpetuation of abnormalisation. By defining those citizens in opposition to the norm of sedentariness, i.e. as nomads, local authorities perpetuate and routinise a radically ambivalent situation of inclusionary efforts in a stable condition of social exclusion.

### **Between sedentariness and ‘nomadness’. Policy addressing Roma**

Besides the already mentioned influence of the ‘State of Emergency’ on municipal employees’ attitudes towards that ambivalent situation, the established and enduring policy framework which restricts their range of possible actions contains two sets of policy explicitly addressing Roma. One set involves three circulars issued by the Ministry of Interior in 1973, 1982 and 1985 addressing all municipal councils. Their fundamental historical significance is that they introduced the expression ‘the nomad problem’ (*il problema dei nomadi*)<sup>8</sup> into the bureaucratic jargon, which henceforth became the dominant vocabulary for defining the place of nomads within Italian society. By ‘nomad problem’, the Ministry meant that nomadism was an obstacle both for public order and for Roma, which had to be removed in order to ensure Roma’s full participation and ‘development’. The circulars envisage only one possible solution to that problem, namely the construction of equipped camping areas for nomads who should settle and send their children to school.

The second set of policies is a set of 12 laws which passed in as many regional councils, among which was Piedmont from 1984 to 1993. The overall goal of nomad camps was to allow nomads to keep their vagrant lifestyle, while simultaneously encouraging them to adopt a sedentary one. All of these laws resemble each other, and – in strict continuity with the government circulars – require municipalities to build ‘nomad camps’ for Roma. Most of the laws plan camps serving two different goals. The first goal is to allow those who want to keep on travelling as nomads to do so, having them temporarily settle in one-half of the camp. The second goal is to let those who want to settle down to abandon their itinerant way of life settle in the other half of the camp. All laws aim at the ‘protection of Roma (or Gypsy) culture’ and are based on the so-called ‘right to nomadism’, namely the right to travel and stop in appropriately equipped camps. At the same time, the laws also aim at the sedentarisation of Roma, by granting more services and rights for those who decide to stop in nomad camps for more than a few days.

At the core of all laws is the housing issue, which is considered exclusively in relation to nomadism, viewed as constituting the overriding cultural trait of Gypsies. In all laws, ‘culture’, as Sigona (2011, p. 597) noticed, ‘is detached from the socio-political context, appearing as a set of rites, customs and uses coming out of an Edenic past (...)’. This conception of culture seems to be particularly close to the essentialist conception of nomadism, that we called ‘nomadness’, which determined the ambivalent tension in Turin between Roma’s exclusion and inclusionary efforts for Roma.

The planning of the camps is part of the legal framework which first the Ministry’s circulars, and then the regional laws, ordered to municipalities, preventing de facto any alternative approach to Roma. The static and essentialist notion of culture upon which the regional laws are founded provides the ideological repertoire to which to refer in order to plan an exceptional housing solution

such as the camp, trying to preserve and concomitantly discourage nomadism, which, in itself, contradicts the norm of sedentariness. In order to understand the conditions of possibilities for ‘nomadness’ to shape the policy and legal framework within which local municipal employees in Turin were carrying out their actions, let us now turn to analysing the expert knowledge on which the two sets of policies drew.

### **Between dangerousness and re-educability. Expert knowledge on Roma**

The choice to contextualise the policy and legal framework within the history of expert knowledge on Roma rather than within the history of expert knowledge on minorities or migrants in general derives from recent research findings. Sociological and anthropological studies suggest that Italian policymakers at all levels of the bureaucratic machine have primarily if not exclusively labelled Romani migrants as ‘Roma’ and ‘nomads’, rather than as ‘migrants’ or ‘labour/economic migrants’ (Sigona 2005, Piasere 2006, Clough Marinaro 2009). Therefore, while other structural elements may have influenced the policies addressing Roma from the 1970s to the 1990s, it is the long history of dominant intellectual and legal discourses on Roma that played the major role in shaping the policy and legal framework. As will become clear below, we selected those texts that mostly influenced policymaking.

The very origin of the figure of ‘Gypsy-nomad’ in Italy is to be found in the late nineteenth century work of intellectual Adriano Colocci (1889) who labelled Roma an everlasting re-educable social danger. In the first criminal code (1861), an indirect reference to Gypsies was made, by enlarging the category of deviant citizens to include ‘idlers and vagrants’ (Burgio 1999).<sup>9</sup> These socio-legal developments were supported and legitimised by a vast and influential scholarship on psychiatry, criminology and sociology of law that invariably relied on bio-physical discourses linking racial(ised) traits, first and foremost nomadism, to deviant behaviours (see Italian racial theorist Lombroso 1876). Hence, in the first authoritative categorisation of Gypsies, the process of abnormalisation was already there, since nomadism allowed bio-physical discourses to function as basis for punitive legal discourses, and, conversely, the latter to function in discourses about bio-physical and racial(ised) characters (Roccheggiani 2011a, 2011b).

From the 1912 establishment in Genoa of the first academic chair of Social Eugenics in Europe, and through the Fascist regime (1922–1943), eugenics became the founding principle of the categorisation of ‘Gypsies’. Rather than emphasising the bio-physical, eugenics helped define the ‘Gypsy-nomad’ dangerousness as bio-psychological, keeping alive the possibility and necessity of re-education. Gypsies once defined simply as dangerous primarily because of their racial(ised) traits over time became re-defined as a constant danger of contagion for the majority due to their moral decay and anti-social behaviours (Boursier 1996, Bravi 2009). During the Fascist regime, this bio-psychological prism

gained even more authority and became linked to Gypsies' alleged psycho-moral characteristics. 'The defence of race' [*La difesa della razza*], a periodical published from 1938 to 1943, was the main forum for Italian racial theorists' debates. According to those debates, while Jews – who were directly addressed by the Racial Laws (1938–1943) – were the 'total others', Gypsies were *mestizos*, namely 'partial others', because their physical traits were not the main markers of the race to which they were theorised to belong. Rather, Gypsies were identified through a *psycho-moral* idiom, by reference to their behaviour, identifying nomadism as the ultimate sign of Gypsies' 'lack of moral sense' (Landra 1940, p. 11). As Semizzi (1939), a Fascist physician and Professor of Social Medicine, put it 'The psycho-moral quality of Gypsy race is defined as a psychological regressive race mutation' (Semizzi 1939, p. 70).

Following the medical experiments on Italian Roma, and the deportation and extermination of them in concentration camps on the basis of bio-psychological and psycho-moral principles (Bravi 2009, pp. 44–45), it was not until 1965 that a systematic expert knowledge on Gypsies in Italy reappeared. It was precisely this new expert knowledge on 'Gypsies' that provided discursive authority to the Ministry of the Interior's circular and to the regional policies for Roma from 1973 to 1993. Abnormalisation continued but shifted its constitutive elements from bio-psychological and psycho-moral to psychosocial characteristics.

### ***1960s–1990s. Lacio Drom and the Gypsy Studies Centre***

While keeping and reinforcing the idea of re-education of 'Gypsies', the expert knowledge that emerged in the mid-1960s fundamentally transformed the understanding of nomadism from a *bio-psychological and psycho-moral* abnormality into a *psychosocial* and 'cultural' obstacle to the progressive evolution of 'Gypsies'. The most important and authoritative forum for the production of this expert knowledge was the journal *Lacio Drom. Bimonthly Journal of Gypsy Studies* [*Lacio Drom. Rivista bimestrale di studi zingari*]. The journal was published from 1965 to 1999 by the Gypsy Studies Centre [*Centro Studi Zingari*] (hereafter GSC), and directed by the Pedagogy Institute of Padua University in cooperation with the charity Nomads Work. It was not only the main intellectual context in which the elaboration of expert theories on Gypsies circulated, but as well a think tank providing consultancy to policymakers. The director of the journal, Mirella Karpati, who worked in the Institute of Pedagogy at the University of Padua, was also the director of the GSC and a long-term partner to Nomads Work.

This post-WWII expert knowledge relied on the key concept of abnormality/anti-sociality (deviance); according to the director of the Institute of Pedagogy at the University of Padua, Gypsies had 'no sociability, or a lower level of sociability' [*livello inferiore di socialità*] in comparison with non-Gypsies (Flores d'Arcais 1967, p. 6). Therefore, they were categorised as a deviant population, which had to be re-educated. From this perspective, Gypsies had to be integrated

through ‘cultural evolution’ and emancipation from their condition of nomadism. In practical policy terms, this meant that the solution of ‘the Gypsy problem’, i.e. ultimately nomadism, was psycho-pedagogic and would require re-educative measures. The most suitable instruments to achieve this goal were equipped halting sites, and in 1970, the Turin section of Nomad Work lobbied the Ministry of the Interior to institute measures towards constructing these halting sites that would allow ‘Gypsy children’ to receive proper schooling services.<sup>10</sup>

This re-educative model that was progressively gaining institutional recognition within the Ministry of Interior circulars (1973, 1982, 1985) was inspired by Mirella Karpati. Through her field-based sociological work and pedagogical activity in Trentino Alto Adige with the local Sinti community, Karpati outlined what she conceived as the social, cultural and psychological-moral features of the ‘nomad people’ (Karpati 1962), updating the pre-1945 label of the Gypsy-nomad ‘re-educable deviant’ with contemporary psychological and sociological studies. She categorised Italian Gypsies as people living in a condition of sociocultural and psychological-moral decadence, due both to their ‘nomad culture’ which was unfit to the Western industrial society, and their contact with the deviant underclass. These factors, along with the historical persecution of ‘Gypsies’, were defined as causes of a ‘congenital psycho-moral instability’ (Karpati 1962, p. 92).

From this point of view, re-education and social inclusion were considered inherently problematic given the Gypsy-nomad’s psycho-moral abnormality (Roccheggiani 2011b). Karpati claimed ‘their wandering has taken roots in their hearts to such an extent that it has become one of their specific connotations. Roma and Sinti people are not ‘Gypsy’ because they travel; rather, they travel because they are ‘Gypsy’ (Karpati 1962, p. 141). Therefore, the priority for achieving social inclusion was to erase nomadism, because this ‘nomadic psychological condition’ was considered the main obstacle to adaptation, i.e. the root cause of the ‘lower level of sociability’ causing anti-social behaviour. In order to accomplish that, according to Karpati, it was ‘necessary, first, to modify the Gypsy’s psychology [*la psicologia dello zingaro*]; second, to provide him/her with a new cultural upgrading and a new capacity to work, and finally, to create an environment which would be in favour of the Gypsy’s inclusion’ (Karpati 1962, p. 143).

However, since the Gypsy’s unstable nomadic character was ‘innate’, how could the potential danger and anomie ever be solved? Karpati did not propose a solution to this dilemma, but her colleagues did; ‘Gypsies suffer the influence of the society, and this suffering can lead them to a state of conflict. Teachers and educators should penetrate inside the Gypsy group, in which poverty and confusion of stimuli may have caused a *break* along their psychic development’ (Cenerini 1967, p. 94): “The Gypsy’ was consequently labelled as abnormal because hardly able to self-promotion and ‘growth’ in relation to his ‘lower level of sociability’ (Flores D’Arcais 1967). Thus, the dilemma that Karpati seemed to leave unexplained was solved by defining the fundamental problem of ‘the Gypsy’ as one of adaptation, in which psycho-pedagogical and sociological

issues overlapped: 'the fundamental problem now is the social sphere: living with others, living the life of the group. Humans should be prepared to take their place in the society [...]' (Cenerini 1967, p. 26).

This view became ultimately coupled with the issue of cultural heritage and 'ethnic character'. In a 1969 article, Karpati argued that 'Ethnicity is a historical-cultural phenomenon and to define it, its socio-psychological facet is essential [...] It is possible to define an ethnotype, which (...) is a sort of mathematic resultant [...]' (Karpati 1969, pp. 7–8). The pedagogist enlisted nine main characteristics of Gypsy adults that at times may have taken extreme, almost pathological forms: internal and external instability; the intensity with which they live in the present; exaggerated individualism; lack of discipline; impulsive and violent reactivity; lack of moderation; emotional suggestibility; thriftless and interest for satisfying immediate needs' (Karpati 1969, p. 8).

Stemming from this discussion, it becomes clear how in the 1960s the GSC, and Karpati in particular, introduced a 'paradigmatic ambivalence' of the 'abnormal', viewing re-education as a possible and necessary remedy to diminish social risk. To paraphrase this line of thought, *the Gypsy is dangerous as s/he is ethnically 'unfit', hence hardly re-educable*. Therefore, with regards to our theoretical discussion, it can be noted that nomadism, understood as *nomadness*, continued to function as a 'switch point' (*échangeur*) (Foucault 2003, p. 33) enabling psycho-social knowledge to function in the field of legal discourse, and vice versa. This peculiar type of abnormalisation in fact envisaged the need for a more sophisticated policy device, such as 'equipped halting sites'. It is therefore not surprising that from 1984 to 1993, before voting upon the drafts of the laws for Roma, regional authorities consulted volunteers and 'experts' working at the GSC and Nomads Work who advocated firmly for including 'camps' and 'equipped areas' in the laws as urban devices to help 'nomads' grow and emancipate themselves (see Picker 2011, p. 611).

### **Connecting practices, policies and expert knowledge**

Between local authorities' practices, the national and regional policy framework and expert knowledge addressing Roma in Italy, a clear connection can be detected, and it has to do with the construction of material and representational spaces, formal or informal settlements, in which Roma are continually abnormalised due to their alleged 'nomadness'. In the prior section, we showed that abnormalisation is predicated upon a representation of Roma which is rooted in expert knowledge and which is projected into the future, oscillating between *potential re-educability* and *potential dangerousness*. As we discussed in the first section, local municipal employees in Turin face the twofold dilemma of providing services to EU citizens living in illegal settlements and to undocumented former Yugoslav citizens residing in legal camps. In order to conceal this dilemma they adopt an ad hoc terminology, deploying the idiom of authorisation in place of the one of legality as well as a 'low profile' when it comes to exposing

their work to the public. This is ultimately based on the overarching and sweeping representation, not empirically grounded but pervasive, of Roma as nomads and of nomadism as the a-historical alleged essence of Roma that we named 'nomadness'. This approach and these representations operate to perpetuate urban spaces, such as 'authorised' camps and two 'unauthorised' slums, where there is neither full exclusion nor full inclusion, but instead a permanent tension oscillating between inclusionary efforts and exclusionary conditions.

Local municipal employees in Turin clearly work within a precise legal framework that was first shaped in 1973 with three Ministry of Interior's circulars promoting the construction of camping areas for nomads, and later with the 12 regional laws for Roma enacted from 1984 to 1993.<sup>11</sup> As we discussed in the section on expert knowledge, these two sets of policies constitute a framework that is predicated upon the same a-historical essence of 'nomadness' that municipal employees in Turin draw on. Therefore, the ambiguous suspension of legal standards applying to the Turin camp and slum can be seen as a reflection of the ambivalent tension oscillating between sedentarisation and the protection of nomadism that the 12 regional laws promulgated.

Both the Ministry of Interior's circulars and the 12 regional laws were entirely based on the expert knowledge that from the early 1960s the Gypsy Studies Centre and the charity Nomads Work produced, intensively working primarily on the education of 'Gypsy children'. These two organisations drew in turn on the history of expert knowledge on Roma deriving from the late nineteenth century *bio-physical* discourses, which, as we discussed, shifted to *bio-psychological* ones from 1912 to WWII. In the aftermath of the war, the contribution of GSC was pivotal in shifting from bio-psychological to *psychosocial* discourses. These three kinds of discourses shared the same kind of assumption of abnormalisation, namely a continuous oscillation between social danger and re-educability that was entirely predicated upon the notion of 'nomadness'; and 'nomadness', as an a-historical notion of nomadism, still functions as the late nineteenth century notion of perversity, that is as 'switch point' (*échangeur*) (Foucault 2003, p. 33), allowing from the 1960s socio-psychological expert knowledge to function in the realm of political-administrative one and vice versa. Finally, the fact that GSC envisaged the halting site as the most suitable housing solution for Roma directly links its founding principles, which were mainly expressed in *Lacio Drom* by GSC, with the concrete dilemmas of Turin municipal employees.

## Conclusion

Sociological and anthropological studies focusing on state approaches to minorities have highlighted the construction by the state of a clearly marked separation between the autochthonous majority and various minorities, marked by essentialist representations (Stolcke 1995, Wright 1998, Palidda 2010, pp. 3–10). Moreover, socio-psychological studies of 'abnormalisation' discussed the

construction of incommensurable difference in conversations or representations of minorities in general (Verkuyten 2001, Chiang 2010), and specifically of Roma (Țileaga 2006, 2007). In this article, we showed that the abnormalisation of Roma in Italy occurs differently. By contextualising recent practices of social inclusion of Roma in Turin within the history of policymaking for Roma in Italy, and that history, in turn, within the history of expert knowledge on Roma, we showed that Roma are being constructed not as an ultimately incompatible, static and separate group; rather, they are constructed as constantly relegated into an exceptional condition which is suspended, legally and spatially, thanks to the working of its founding representation, what we named ‘nomadness’.

Rather than being a socio-geographical phenomenon contextualised in precise processes of labour, production and consumptions, as nomadism is, ‘nomadness’ is an a-historical property that all Roma would allegedly bear and that, most importantly, would allegedly constitute their most intimate and true essence. As we discussed in the section on expert knowledge, the authoritative discursive construction of nomadism as *nomadness* – thanks precisely to its being ill-defined and thus weak epistemologically – was a ‘switch point’ (*échangeur*) (Foucault 2003, p. 33), allowing psychosocial notions to function in a political-administrative sphere (e.g. the regional laws and the three circulars), and, conversely, political-administrative notions (e.g. of school, education and campsites) to function in the psychosocial sphere. Introducing the concept of *nomadness* is a fundamental contribution to the study of abnormalisation of Roma, not only in Italy, but in Europe at large. As several studies have showed (e.g. Lucassen *et al.* 1998, Okely 1983, p. 52, Piasere 2006), ‘nomadism’ has virtually never rigorously been defined and used by state and other authorities as an analytical tool for understanding Romani social worlds in precise social contexts; rather, it has often superficially and instrumentally served goals of criminalisation and urban seclusion (About 2005, Picker 2010, 2013b).

While there are peculiarities that make the abnormalisation of Roma unique, we are persuaded that it would be heuristic to underline similarities with other similar social and cultural processes in Europe. In discussing the public debates over immigration in Belgium Blommaert and Vershueren (1998) claim that the abnormalisation of immigrants coincides with a mediatic essentialist notion of culture; with policy discourses on immigration as a threat, and with homogenisation, ‘or the removal of disturbing differences’ (Blommaert and Vershueren 1998, p. 120) as policy response. The case of the Roma in Italy seems to fit only the first line of argument, which recalls the idea of ‘nomadness’. Homogenisation, on the other hand, does not seem to be at the core of the abnormalisation of Roma, inasmuch, as we showed, the 1960s to 1990s expert knowledge did promoted cultural protection.

National public discourses on migrants in Europe seem to only partially resemble the processes of abnormalisation of Roma. In this regard, perhaps the closest case to the Roma is the one of the Jews. The history of abnormalisation of European Jews has been copiously researched under the heading of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. Due to the limited space, our discussion does not intend to be

exhaustive, but to briefly account for two comparative lines of analysis in view of encouraging further comparative research on abnormalisation.<sup>12</sup> One of the most relevant similarities with the abnormalisation of Jews is the formation and evolution of the ghetto. Far from being juxtaposable, the Jewish ghetto and the Italian nomad camps (or other types of camps for Roma, for instance ‘villages d’insertion’ in France, see Picker 2012b), can anyway be viewed conjointly through the prism of Wacquant’s (2012) analysis of the ghetto. Both socio-spatial urban configurations were planned as alternatives to expulsions or evictions, and both can be seen as devices of territorial fixation vis-à-vis a danger that is first and foremost ‘geographical’, or ‘spatial’.

A second similarity is racialisation in legal and juridical texts. Historian Illuzzi’s (2009) work on the categorisation of Roma in post-unification Italy shows that the main criterion for considering Roma was not their marginalised socio-economic conditions, but their lack of ‘italianness’ (*italianità*). This was a racial characterisation, as ‘Gypsies’ were, according to Interior Minister Cavallina (1872), recognisable ‘at first sight’. As we discussed at the start of the section on expert knowledge, the strong influence of Lombroso’s criminological theories became tangible during Fascism. As for the post-WWII period, more research on race and racialisation needs to be done with regard to the logic through which Roma are identified, and state and private actions for them planned and implemented.

Similarly, Legal Studies scholar Herman (2006) shows that throughout the twentieth century’s British legal texts Jews were constructed as a racial threat to the territorial integrity of the nation. She notices that ‘“the Jew” remains the not quite/not yet/not ever “Englishman” ’ (Herman 2006, p. 300). She also examines the social context within which racialisation pervaded judges’ representation of Jews, as, at the beginning of the century, Jews could be found in virtually all social classes, but the ‘more alien Jew’ (Herman 2006, p. 290) was the poor male Polish immigrant Jew. This kind of intersectional analyses of class, gender, nationality and racialising idiom would probably reveal important and interesting findings in the case of abnormalisation of Roma as well. More social science research on abnormalisation processes would be able to encourage (self-)reflexive stances behind state actions and expert knowledge vis-à-vis minorities that seem ever more crucial for living in equal and open societies.

### Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Isabella Clough Marinaro, Jon Fox, Rosanna Castorina, Daria Ukhova, an anonymous reviewer and an editor of *Identities* for their helpful comments and revisions on a previous version of this article.

### Notes

1. Roma in Italy were explicitly excluded from law 482/1999, namely the first and only law protecting linguistic-historical minorities. In this sense, they can be seen as an ‘unrecognized minority’ (Picker 2013a).
2. This is the figure that Saletti Salza (2009) estimates.

3. Giovanni Picker carried out the ethnographic fieldwork as part of a multi-sited ethnography of Romanian migration to Italy that was coordinated by the International and European Forum of Migration Research (FIERI); Gabriele Roccheggiani conducted the genealogical analysis as part of his Ph.D. in Sociology.
4. These areas were planned in order to give nomads the possibility to stop and gradually dismissing the always potentially deviant nomad lifestyle.
5. All names of persons have been changed to guarantee anonymity.
6. See also the 2008 report by the nomadism office, in which the only expressions to describe those sites are 'authorised' and 'non-authorised' (Città di Torino e Prefettura di Torino 2009).
7. See Clough Marinaro (2009) for similar dynamics in Rome.
8. The expression 'Il problema dei nomadi' ambivalently carries two meanings at once, 'the problem that nomads face', and 'the problem that nomads pose to non-nomads'. Our choice to translate it with 'the nomad problem' follows similar expressions such as 'the Gypsy problem' ('il problema degli Zingari') and underlines the prevalence of the second meaning that becomes clear once the envisaged solution is proposed, which has always been about public order and discipline rather than stemming from 'nomads' needs.
9. Article 463, n. 3 of the 1861 Criminal code.
10. Motion approved in Turin on 16–18 September 1970, by the directors of *Lacio Drom* special classes for 'Gypsies' (Roccheggiani 2011a, p. 305).
11. These processes do not only occur in Turin; see the cases of Tuscany and Florence (Picker 2011, 2012a, 2012c); Verona (Piasere 1991) and Napoli (Sigona 2002).
12. The literature on similarities between the abnormalisation of Roma and Jews seems to focus predominantly on Nazi and Fascist persecutions (e.g. Mueller-Hill 1988, Levy 1999).

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