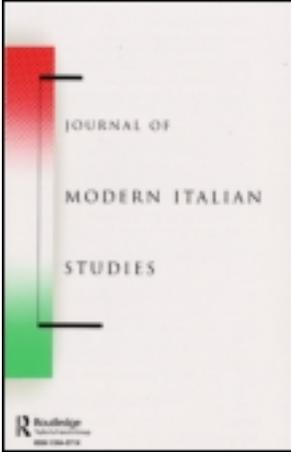


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Tra inclusione ed esclusione. Una storia sociale dell'educazione dei rom e dei sinti in Italia

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Luca Bravi (2009) *Tra inclusione ed esclusione. Una storia sociale dell'educazione dei rom e dei sinti in Italia* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli), 7 – 173 pp., ISBN 9788840013718, €28,00, soft cover

National-level policies in Italy addressing Roma and Sinti (hereafter R&S) during the twentieth century were carried out in two main periods: during fascism, through re-education, deportation and confinement programmes; and from 1965 to the early 1990s, through special classes for Romani children and the construction of nomad camps. The end of the first decade of the twenty-first century marked the beginning of a third phase, starting in May 2008, when the government issued a series of measures, including a census, which was soon after condemned by the EU Parliament on the grounds of ethnic discrimination. This book is the first scholarly endeavour that sheds light on each of these three periods, stressing their cultural connections. It does so on two analytical levels: first, by discussing the cultural legacy of the first period on the other two; second, by constantly interrogating the reader about the ways in which historical facts and collective memory can be better combined in current and future educational projects. A continuous intersection of these two levels is possible owing to the broad aim of the book, which is 'to reconstruct their [R&S's] history, which has often been silenced, and in particular those events that can tell us something about the long-term attempts to re-educate them' (p. 16).

The introduction sets the theoretical background, against which the next seven chapters unfold. The concept of education that lies at the basis of the entire work stems from analyses of the peculiarly modern traits of the *Shoah*, and aims at 'helping to educate young people to resist pressures to conform and to resort to xenophobic simplifications' (p. 15). In thorough opposition to such a view of education were the re-education programmes aimed at R&S, carried out by the Nazi and Italian fascist regimes, which are outlined in chapter 1. R&S were considered by both regimes to be asocial because of their alleged hereditary character traits. This provides the opportunity for the author to clarify an often-misinterpreted element of the Italian Fascist regime's persecution of R&S: the supposed absence of any racial motivation behind it. Indeed, the regime's view that their 'asocial' nature was inherited was clearly in line with racialist theories that were being put forward by Italian pseudo-scientists at the time. However, this is not the main similarity that the author wants to underline between the Nazi and fascist persecutions of R&S. Rather, Bravi presents an in-depth discussion of the fact that both regimes carried out programs for re-educating 'Gypsies', and only after these failed did they proceed to deportations. But where has the memory of these events gone, and how is it being communicated to the new generations?

Bravi offers an answer in chapter 2, which investigates the ways collective memory has translated into contemporary institutional practices. The main reference here is to Law 211, passed in 2000, which established 27 January as official 'Day of Memory' (*Giorno della memoria*), commemorating the Red Army's first arrival at Auschwitz in 1945. The author problematizes the 'unique character' of the *Shoah* ('catastrophe' in Hebrew) within the persecution and extermination projects carried out by Nazi and fascist forces, arguing that that event has been simplified through a selective memory. One of the main consequences of such simplification has been to neglect the 'catastrophes' that befell other minorities, resulting in this part of history not being included in school curricula and educational projects. Ultimately, this has contributed to

confirming and perpetuating the already rooted stigma of R&S being asocial, nomads and criminals.

A further and equally important element of continuity between the 'Auschwitz paradigm' (p. 25) and the post-Auschwitz era are ideas and institutional practices of re-education targeted at R&S. This is the focus of chapters 3 and 4, which analyse connections between those ideas and practices, and the implementation of segregating policies such as the mid-1980s regional laws, which ordered the construction of nomad camps throughout much of Italy. New efforts towards re-education were enacted from the early 1960s onwards, mainly by two interlinked associations, *Opera Nomadi* and *Centro studi zingari*. These efforts were not successful, but that is not the main focus of the findings presented in chapters 3 and 4. What is emphasized, instead, are the connections between ideas and pedagogical approaches of segregating *zingari* in special schools and the nomad camps as we got to know them since the mid-1980s. It is worth underlining that, before the publication of this book, no systematic study dissected the ideological and practical connections between the R&S's spatial segregation and the drive to re-educate them. The framework within which this flow of ideas and practices has been possible is what the author calls 'a broad process of "keeping distance" from *zingari* over the last centuries' (p. 83). It is this foundation that, paradoxically, underlay the very assumption that ghettoizing Gypsies – at school and then in camps – was an excellent means to foster their social integration.

Although the main context of this study is Italy, in the introduction the author stresses the importance of understanding the history of R&S within European history, 'because Europe has been marked by a common Western project of obsessive re-education of this minority' (pp. 16–17). In light of this, in chapter 5 two studies on the education of R&S in Europe, one carried out in 1986 and the other in 2000–2003, are reviewed. After discussing the importance of the first research, which was the earliest analysis of the education of R&S in the European context, the author reviews the Italian case, one of the seven countries that are covered in the second study. Of particular interest is the experience of Melfi, where Romani children have ever been going to school since 1910 together with non-Roma. No segregation practices have ever been introduced and no accent on cultural difference has ever been necessary, as Roma have always been considered and treated as equal citizens there.

Chapter 6 is a rich and in-depth inquiry into recent episodes (2007–2009) of anti-Gypsism in Italy, underlining the role of local policies in perpetuating the stigmatizing idiom of nomadism, as well as the everyday experience of segregation for many R&S. Commenting on the census carried out in nomad camps (which included collecting fingerprints) ordered in May 2009 by the Berlusconi government, Bravi states: 'The circle seems now to be closed, and we are once again confronted with Auschwitz, in a period which is supposed to mark a clear-cut change in relation to that inhuman experience' (p. 140). This is the opening of the last chapter (number 7), concluding the entire work. The main contents of the book are outlined: the history of re-education programmes carried out by totalitarian regimes vis-à-vis R&S; its repressed memory in contemporary educational programmes; its legacy from 1965 to the early 1990s; and the importance of building a renewed educational policy by promoting a pluralist and democratic culture.

Although the amount of historical detail is impressive, as is the range of periods reviewed, a limitation of this study is the lack of a methodological section. This would have better positioned the study, being of particular help to understand the extent to

which further research on the topic is needed. Moreover, since the author challenges a 'conventional wisdom' in Holocaust Studies (i.e. the uniqueness of the *Shoah*), a methodological discussion would have provided a more solid ground to the author's thesis, as the author himself clearly calls for 'the necessity of remaining steadfast in fighting any form of Holocaust revisionism (*negazionismo*)' (p. 145).

We are confronted here with a historian who not only tells us what happened and what the cultural legacy of those facts is. More than that, he shows us why it is crucial for us to care about that, and why translating such care into an ethically conscious institutional work in school programmes seems to be the *conditio sine qua non* for living in a pluralist democratic society.

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Joseph Sciorra (ed.) (2011) *Italian Folk: Vernacular Culture in Italian-American Lives* (New York: Fordham University Press), ix + 257 pp., ISBN 9780823232666, \$28.00, soft cover

Readers of the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* would be hard pressed not to find something of interest in *Italian Folk: Vernacular Culture in Italian-American Lives*. This amply illustrated and solid collection of essays presents a wide range of topics from the perspective of diverse academic disciplines. Edited by Joseph Sciorra, the volume grew out of a 2001 special issue of the *Italian-American Review* and consists of five revised essays from that publication, one revised essay from another journal and five new essays.

A brief summary suggests the collection's extensive subject matter (the foodways, music, popular celebrations, religious practices and artistic endeavors of Italian-Americans) as presented by historians, ethnomusicologists, art historians, folklorists and anthropologists. Simone Cinotto's "'Sunday dinner? You had to be there!': the social significance of food in Italian Harlem, 1920–40' deals with the centrality of food in family life and ethnic identity through a focus on an Italian-American community of East Harlem in the 1920s and 30s. Cinotto draws on oral histories compiled by Leonard Covello. An 1896 immigrant from Basilicata, Covello became a high-school principal and community leader in East Harlem. As Cinotto notes, his oral histories let 'the voices of immigrants be heard in a time when they rarely were' (p. 13). John Allan Cicala's 'Cuscuszu in Detroit, July 18, 1993' examines his grandmother's preparation of a particular meal featuring *cuscuszu*, a version of couscous from the coastal province of Trapani in northwest Sicily. Cicala considers the way family dynamics shape the dish's conceptualization, preparation and consumption. In 'The Italian immigrant basement kitchen in North America', Lara Pascali discusses the basement kitchen as a feature of postwar Italian houses in and around Toronto, Montreal and New York. As opposed to the showroom of the upstairs kitchen, the basement kitchen was a workplace as well as a family gathering place for celebratory occasions. Kenneth Scambray's 'Creative responses to the Italian immigrant experience in California: Baldassare Forestiere's underground gardens and Simon Rodia's Watts towers' focuses on the one hundred