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## Modern Italy

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### Rom e Sinti in Italia. Tra stereotipi e diritti negati, edited by Roberto Cherchi and Gianni Loy

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of the data, but readers also need to have access to the entire database to pursue specific or particular interests.

The regional peculiarities of a historically heterogeneous Italy emerge strongly from this volume. Regional differences – both political and socio-economic – have featured strongly in Italian political histories. This volume is an extraordinary instrument for verifying the existence of distinct political cultures in the various areas of the country, and hence for analysing the continuation and the evolution from a diachronic point of view. In which regions was the Historic Left (*Sinistra storica*) most firmly entrenched? In what year did the Christian Democrats gain the highest percentage vote? In the regions where the Alleanza Nazionale became established, which political cultures had previously predominated? These are all questions that can be answered in a few seconds, in the time it takes to leaf through the pages of this book – which comes complete with notes, cross-references and comments that facilitate its use in the hands of readers without expert knowledge. Alongside statistical analysis and graphics, readers will find methodological notes, numerous images of electoral posters and well-known political participants, and some brief paragraphs explaining the evolution of Italian electoral legislation, complete with chronological tables.

In brief, this is a valuable book for anyone who, for any reason, is interested in electoral activity in Italy and its historical dimension, both because of its utility as an analytical tool and because – thanks to the immediacy of its cartographic display – it can encourage new observations and suggest additional paths of research. As the authors correctly remind us in the book's introduction, 'the eye sees things that escape the mind'.

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**Rom e Sinti in Italia. Tra stereotipi e diritti negati**, edited by Roberto Cherchi and Gianni Loy, Rome, Ediesse, 2009, 268 pp., € 15.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-230-1365-0

**Politiche possibili. Abitare le città con i Rom e i Sinti**, edited by Tommaso Vitale, Rome, Carocci, 2009, 299 pp., € 31.00, ISBN 978-88-430-5049-9

In *The plot against America* (2004), Philip Roth plots the alternative history of an imagined US government's implementation of anti-Semitic policies during the Second World War. The chronicle narrated by the nine-year-old Philip captures how, in little more than two years, anti-Semitic collective feelings, state policies and ultimately physical violence progressively come to seem banal in the eyes of non-Jewish people around him and his family in Newark.

The scenario presents similarities with the policies now being carried out vis-à-vis Roma and Sinti in Italy. It has now been about four years (May 2007) since the Italian government signed agreements with the mayors of Milan and Rome ('Patto per Milano sicura' and 'Patto per Roma sicura'), in which 'nomad camps' and 'migration and integration' were respectively listed as the two main causes of a supposedly increased sense of insecurity amongst citizens. Although rooted in a long tradition of institutional

discrimination (Colacicchi 2008) those agreements can be seen as the inauguration of a new national and local politics towards Roma in Italy, rhetorically sustained by the idiom of legality and security. Rather than protecting a largely misrepresented and unrecognised minority (Roma and Sinti were excluded from the 1999 law on the protection of 'historic linguistic minorities'), Italian authorities seem to be addressing a situation of 'segregation policies or de facto exclusion of members of a group from political, economic, social and cultural life' (COHRE et al. 2008, 13) exclusively through emergency measures.

The two collections reviewed here provide an exhaustive overview of the relations between state and local authorities, civil society and Romani social life, going beyond simplistic media rhetoric. They address key questions: What is happening to political practices concerning Roma and Sinti in Italy? What are the reasons for the current discrimination? What can be done in order to achieve social integration?

The first question is at the basis of Roberto Cherchi and Gianni Loy's edited volume, which focuses on the social and legal factors that made possible a resurgence of discrimination. As well as two short stories of everyday situations involving Roma and Sinti, the book contains essays on Italian laws and the recent evolution of institutional discrimination, the history of Roma in Italy and the exclusion of Roma from active participation in society. The lack of introduction and conclusion suggests that the aim of the work is to draw a comprehensive general picture of Roma and Sinti in the Italian context. The core issue of the work is the legal framework within which Roma and Sinti as a group might fall: specifically, their place within current non-discrimination laws and regulations on the status of aliens.

Loy suggests that the reasons behind the new wave of discriminatory politics vis-à-vis Roma can be found in deep-rooted traditions of prejudice. The author discusses the impact of such prejudices on the recent production of governmental legal and administrative texts concerning Roma, discussing the ways in which 'the concept of race is being reintroduced in the juridical system of our country' (p. 32). Although this statement may appear rather astonishing, especially in the light of the 1938 Fascist racial laws, it is meaningful in relation to the Prime Minister's decree n. 3678 (31 May 2008) ordering census and identification of people living in nomad camps. The decree was heavily criticised by independent media all over the world; on 10 July 2008 it was declared an act of racial discrimination by EU Parliament resolution n. 336. The government justified the measure by noting that identification was not to be carried out based on ethnicity, but rather according to the place (nomad camps) where 'people' (not specified as Roma) were living. However, none of the essays in the book focuses on the government's rhetoric, which framed the measure as a non-discriminatory one. Analysing the precise fallacies and/or 'heterogenesis of goals' of that rhetoric would probably allow us to better understand the racialised premises of institutional actions, and assess whether they are part of a wider nationalist project or rather the consequence of shared prejudices.

In Vitale's edited work, about 20 local cases in Italy (plus one in France) are discussed, focusing on the ways in which the 'nomad problem' has been consistently integrated and regulated by local politicians and the civil society. The author's overall aim is to provide a comparative framework for scholars, activists and local authorities alike, in view of developing political, social and administrative actions which privilege the specificity of each social and historical context. After a brief introduction, the volume is divided in five parts. The first part is a historical, legal and cultural analysis of Roma in Europe today. The second part outlines a few case studies discussing the ways in which local conflicts

involving Roma generally occur. The third and the fourth parts constitute the core of the book. These are narratives of local experiences by practitioners such as social workers, activists and researchers, focusing on policies concerning two main areas of interventions: education, healthcare and employment (third part); and alternative housing solutions to the nomad camps (fourth part). Only successful case studies of local integration policies are discussed. The goal of the comparison is not ‘to exemplify but to amend’ (p. 267) previous findings suggesting a single discriminatory policy framework for Roma and Sinti.

In fact, the editor’s previous comparative research on local policies vis-à-vis Roma in Italy uncovers the lack of equal treatment between Roma and non-Roma, emphasising that the only two policies applied to the former are periodically pushing them into peripheral camps and then evicting them. The case studies analysed here suggest that implementing social integration policies is not only possible but also politically advantageous, because in the long term this leads to a decline in social unrest involving the local citizenry. In the conclusion (fifth part), empirically detecting a few key conditions under which effective social integration policies can be carried out, Vitale implicitly points out that the failure of policies towards the integration of Roma is also one of the reasons for the current national discriminatory politics.

There are three key social policies. First, the use of a variety of public policy tools for housing with a view to going beyond the nomad camp: social housing; self-build; furnished residential areas; and stop areas for itinerant groups. Second, encouraging Roma and Sinti’s participation in the decision-making process, providing local representatives with periodic consultations concerning the planning and then the implementation of every public action addressed to Roma. Third, the coordinated and integrated use of public policies involving different areas such as healthcare, employment and housing, so that the criteria to assess them are their overall effects on Roma and Sinti’s quality of life, and not only their housing, healthcare or employment conditions as isolated phenomena.

This is a valuable collection of case studies, and its being the first example of a structural comparison in the Italian context encourages cross-national comparisons of policies regarding Romani groupings throughout Europe. Vitale’s collection leaves the reader with one major open question: what have those case studies in common, besides the fact that they are about Roma and Sinti? In other words, what is so different about being Roma and Sinti, as compared with the rest of local society, and how can a local administrator recognise such difference without falling into what the author calls ‘differentialist treatment’? My own fieldwork among civil servants in Florence – one of the most successful local administrations with regard to the integration of Roma and Sinti, as Vitale acknowledges – suggests that long-term strategies have not guided local policies. Rather, urgency, charity, a conception of space according to the so-called ‘Gypsy culture’ (*cultura zingara*) and other apolitical issues seemed to me to be the main reference points for local entrepreneurs, both politicians and think-tanks. Drawing on the pragmatic stance of French social theorists such as Thévenot, Vitale is more optimistic.

The trends to which these collections draw attention are real and alarming. The time has come to throw light on the dark corners of democracy, before what happened in Europe only 70 years ago reappears in slightly different forms, fashioning scenarios similar to those witnessed in Roth’s alternative history.

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