

The invention of the territory and the exclusion of the *others*

Annamaria Rivera*

Nationalism and the stigmatisation of the *others*

There is something paradoxical in the success achieved by the celebrations marking the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy. The fact that it took place during a period of serious decline in an Italy stricken with economic crisis and recession, weakening the fabric of democracy as well as social and political cohesion, suggests that it was in some sense more a collective rite of exorcism. The celebrations culminated with the approval of a law requiring the teaching of the Italian national anthem, the Inno di Mamelli, in state schools and establishing the *Day of National Unity, the Constitution, the Anthem and the Flag*. These celebrations were characterised mostly by grandiloquence and an uncritical glorification of *Risorgimento nationalism* with few exceptions. Amongst them the President of the Associazione Nazionale Presidi (National Association of Headteachers), who, after the final approval of this law, criticized its 19th century tone, arguing that parliament should indicate *strategies* and *direction* and not *impose* teaching content.

The rhetoric of the *Risorgimento* aims, amongst other things, at masking the persistent fragility of unity and civic spirit in Italy. Commenting on the results of a Demos survey, the sociologist Ilvo Diamanti (2010) noted that when the

* Department of Historical and Social Science, University of Bari, Italy

majority expressed a sense of national pride, it *'is based on non-civic and pre-political elements, i.e., the beauty of the landscape, artistic and cultural heritage, fashion and cuisine'*. The picture that emerges is that of the Italians *'resigned to their own pathological and historical lack of civic spirit, supplanted and compensated by an all pervasive and distensible cynicism'*.

As has repeatedly been stressed by the historian Alberto Mario Banti (2011), the emphasis on patriotism, which has the *Risorgimento* as the undeniable founding myth of the *republic*, also ends up at times repeating, explicitly or implicitly, the systematic and naturalistic nationalism of the 19th century, rather than the proactive and revolutionary ideas of the Age of Enlightenment. It is a nationalism in which idea of the nation is one of a community of *blood and offspring*, with its own genealogy and a conception of the political community as a system of differences and oppositions. "*We*"-unique, special, homogeneous- opposed to the "*other*", foreigners, as such dangerous to the integrity of our community, being it national or local.

Country, nation, identity and community are concepts which, especially if connected and articulated among themselves, often end up hiring regressive variations that highlight the themes of offspring and of the "right of blood", of the nation as biopolitic community, reaffirming a conception of nationality and citizenship essentially restricted to "native". Not by chance, in Italy citizenship is still intended as an attribution of positive law, which clearly divides persons on a territory as citizens and foreigners.

According to the historian René Gallissot, it is merely by invoking the grandness of the national identity that these lines of division in inter-ethnic relations become entrenched, *'with the risk of affirming racial and hereditary segregation'* (Gallissot, 2001a, p.71). Suffice it to say that the stigma of difference of origin is *so* powerful to pass from migrants *'to their children and grandchildren, who continue to be*

called immigrants , even if they were born here and have never seen the land of their parents or grandparents' (Gallissot, 2001b, p.190). This obsession with origin, also applicable to other European Countries, is above all reflected in the Italian legislative system in which the principle of *jus sanguinis* is rigidly enshrined, '*namely the idea that citizenship entails a wealth of rights entitled to an offspring community and not a territorial community'* (Nanni, 2012, p.114); something which ends up justifying the prejudice that makes the foreigner the *stranger* or *the other par excellence*, if not the *enemy*. All of this derives from a passive replication of the structures, principles and legislation that linger on from the old model of Italy as a Country of emigration and of a configuration of Italian society that is now largely obsolete.

Erasure of an 'ugly' past makes the present murky

It is also significant that during the official celebrations no mention was made of the more inglorious side of post-unification Italian history. An *erasure of the ugly past* is still a prominent feature of the national biography and any retelling of its history. I allude here to the removal of the connection between the processes inherent to Italian unification and Italian colonial ambitions (internal and external; the South of Italy, Libya, the Horn of Africa and so forth), which form an integral part of 150 years of post-unification history. In addition, I also refer to a somewhat *convenient* and *selective memory* with regard to the long history, almost without interruption, of anti-Semitism, both Catholic and laic, as well as of anti-tziganism. Furthermore, I refer to the racism towards Southern Italians and the brutal state-sanctioned, colonialist racism of the *imperial* fascist regime towards those groups as '*giudei*' (jews), '*negri*' (negroes)" and '*zingari*' (gypsies).

As repeatedly argued by Nicola Labanca (2002), despite an even late historical study production on Italian colonial rule, these studies have aimed at decolonising public memory, a memory that continues to propagate the cliché of a short-lived *mendicant* form of colonialism alongside the myth of the Italians as ‘*good people*’. It is this last point that forms the central core of the ‘*Italian ideology of the era of decolonisation*’ (Labanca, 2002, p.479). In truth, having never really been decolonised, public memory nourishes the present with the detritus of a sketchy past that is exempt from any real criticism. Xenophobia and racism still continue to replicate those images, idioms, clichés, stereotypes and prejudices that echo the rhetoric of anti-Semitism and anti-tziganism as well as historical and colonial racism.

This inability to transcend the *ugly past* meaningfully, and thus accept the reality of immigration, is due to multiple historical and cultural reasons, amongst others, a provincial mentality; the absence of moral, intellectual, political and administrative rigour; a dearth of any civic and democratic consciousness; historical impotence; fragmentation; incoherence of *Welfare State* policy and, to use the formula of the sociologist Enrico Pugliese, subsequently the comparatively recent swiftness with which Italy has become a ‘*migratory crossroads*’. Pugliese has pointed out several times (see, e.g., Pugliese, 2002) that Italy has in recent decades become a major Country of *immigration* whilst still remaining a Country of *emigration*.

For the most part, the celebrations generally circumvented any reflection upon the make up of the complex and pluralistic Italy of today, a complex tapestry of origins, cultures, religions, customs and lifestyles and above all a complexity which today defines Italy much more so than in the past. This is not to say that the past was homogenous, far from it. As with almost every national entity, the nation

itself was the result of a more or less artificial process -that was also more or less violent and more or less successful- of *reductio ad unum*. Nonetheless, this plurality stands out today as a conspicuous and structural constituent of the morphology of the Country, as may already be seen from a simple analysis of the numbers of *non-Italians*.

In 1861, the very year of unification, there were 88639 *foreign* residents out of a total population of 22182000, thus equalling 0.4% of the population; today this has grown to 8.2%. According to the most recent estimate of a statistical dossier (Caritas and Migrantes, 2012), the total number of legal immigrants, including European Union citizens and those not registered in the population registry, came slightly in excess of 5000000 people at the end of 2011.

This figure is also significant as it includes a figure of nearly 1000000 children of non-E.U. residents, including 763000 born in Italy. These are the inappropriately named *second generation* who are devoid of Italian nationality as a result of particularly anachronistic and discriminatory legislation. In short, approximately *one in seven* so-called *foreign* residents is indeed '*no immigrant whatsoever having been born and raised (...) in the territory of the state*' (Nanni, 2012, p.117).

It is noteworthy that Italian legislation provides no mechanism for the automatic acquisition of citizenship, not even for the children of *foreign* parents, children who were indeed born, brought up and educated *in* Italy. They may possibly acquire citizenship, usually after a long bureaucratic process, presenting their application within one year of reaching the age of majority, yet only if they can prove *continuity of residence*. This also serves none other than to increase the numbers with regard to so-called *foreigners*, seeing as about a *fifth* of these *foreigners* would have acquired the nationality of their Country of birth and/or permanent residence in other Western nations.

Although largely excluded from formal citizenship, immigrants have, however, demonstrated that they are indeed capable of being contributing and participating citizens. Suffice it to say that they represent 14.8% of active trade union membership and that a considerable number are equally involved with various democratic organisations from which some persons tend to emerge, who are able to play an active part in political and cultural debate, albeit much more slowly than in other European Countries.

The well-established yet uneven territorial spread of immigration

To understand how the presence of the population *'of immigrant origin'* contributes to the complex and pluralistic structure of Italian society, a glance at the statistics on religious affiliation is enough. According to estimations by the aforementioned dossier (Caritas and Migrantes, 2012), amongst the 5011307 *foreign* residents in Italy, there were 2702074 Christians (53.9%), 1482000 Muslims (32.9%), 215000 atheists/agnostics (4.3%), 131254 Hindus (2.6%), 97362 Buddhists (1.9%) and 69215 people of other so-called "*Eastern religions*" (1.9%), as of 31/12/2011.

These data, amongst other things, deny to the widely-held stereotypical view of immigrants being Muslims, other than that of being and *poor* and *non-E.U.* In fact, the most recent estimates indicate that the largest immigrant population comes from an E.U. Country, Romania (997000). In second position after Romania is Morocco (506 369) in third is another European Country, Albania (491495). According to the dossier, the rankings with regard to Country of origin are China (277570), Ukraine (223782), Philippines (152382), Republic of Moldova (147519), India (145164) and Tunisia (122595).

Even though this is not always acknowledged, to show how immigration has now entered a phase of consolidation and stabilisation, there are various sociological indicators such as family reunions, *'mixed'* marriages, the education within the school system of children born to *foreigners, i.e., the second generation*. This well-established reality has an impact not only on various social and cultural but also on economic dimensions.

Although the effects of the financial and economic crisis, particularly job insecurity and poverty, hit migrant workers harder than the *locals*, migrant workers continue to contribute to and form an essential part of the economy. This is most true of those sectors that are, more so than others, typified by *black market labour*. This sector is characterised by hard and poorly paid work, often of limited duration and low social recognition, such as domestic help jobs -especially towards the elderly-, catering, construction work and agriculture, to name but a few. Particularly in construction work and agriculture immigrants are often subjected to conditions of servitude, if not a form of *slavery*. The era of triumphant neo-liberalism and globalised capital has not seen an end to working relations and conditions that may be described as *'archaic'*. Furthermore, it has even incorporated the *'non-contemporary'*, as Ernst Bloch might put it, subsuming even more obsolete forms of exploitation. In this regard, European and international human rights organisations are unceasing in their calls on the Italian government concerning the plight of migrant workers, workers whose experience is typified by *'ill-treatment, low wages, late payment, excessive working hours and situations of slave labour, situations in which pay is withheld by companies in order to pay for a place in crowded dormitories without water or electricity'* (International Labour Organization, 2009).

In short, albeit concentrated at the lower end of the labour market, immigrants, who contribute significantly to Italian GDP (approximately 10%), constitute a sizeable share of the manual/unskilled labour force and continue to uphold certain sectors such as the service sector as well as care and assistance. This is confirmed by the aforementioned data (Caritas and Migrantes, 2012): whilst 40% of Italians are employed as manual or unskilled labourers, 83% of E.U. immigrants and 90% of non-E.U. immigrants are employed in these sectors.

Finally, it would be useful to look at another feature of immigration in Italy, its uneven distribution throughout the Country; *'with appreciable specific features, from one place to another, with respect to gender, type of business and prevailing employment sectors'* (Di Sciullo, 2012, p.246). Of the foreign-born, nearly three in four employees work in regions of the Central-North, of which about three in ten are in the North-West, a quarter in the North-East and over a fifth in central Italy. As for distribution by region, Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Veneto and Tuscany are the regions with the highest frequency of foreign-born workers respectively. Lombardy alone is home to as many as one fifth at national level, corresponding approximately to the total number to be found throughout the whole of central Italy. The province of Milan alone has a number of *foreign-born* workers only a little lower than for the entire South of Italy (Di Sciullo, 2012, p.247). The analysis is based on the only possible source of statistics, i.e., INAIL (National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work) data: INAIL registers its members according to place of birth (born in Italy/*foreign-born*). An intrinsic, low error is due to a minimum number of Italian employees/workers who have returned to Italy after migrating abroad.

Even when taking into account that in the Mezzogiorno undeclared *black market labour* work is more prevalent and

therefore by definition skews the statistical data mentioned, the so-called '*southern question*' seems to repeat itself even as far as immigration is concerned. Moreover, the relevance hereof has increased with the economic downturn, a downturn which has seen the South drop back to 1950s levels. There has been a sharp fall in income, domestic consumption and employment, compounded by a significant reduction in public spending and the increased burden of local taxation. According to the 2012 report of Svimez (Association for Industrial Development in the Mezzogiorno), in the South of Italy, where fewer than one in four young women work, *real* unemployment exceeds 25%. As far as poverty is concerned, according to the ISTAT report of 2011 it concerns almost one in four southern families (Svimez, 2012).

Viewing the foreigner as a *stranger* or *enemy*

Awareness and/or acceptance of structural and permanent immigration is quite weak in terms of the collective consciousness and imagination of Italians. A part of the population continues to perceive and represent migrants as a mere workforce, as people passing through the Country and who, sooner or later, will leave. Furthermore, migrants are even seen as interlopers and illegitimate beneficiaries of social security, if not as a threat to the majority and collective security.

More than in any other European Country, it is in Italy where the *foreigner* is often associated with disorder and deviance. This bias is not only to be found within a large segment of public opinion but it also directs the work of certain institutions/authorities and for this reason immigration is mostly viewed in terms of a question of security and public order. Suffice it to say that 80% of

expenditure on immigration is spent on its repression (*provisions* against illegal entry; internment structures for '*illegal*' immigrants and deportations) whereas only 20% is spent on activities in line with policies of integration.

This is reflected by, and simultaneously nurtured with, policies and legislation on immigration that are typified by resorting to criminal prosecution and the police on a massive scale. It is enough to look at the regulations that tie the arrival of immigrants seeking work to a far-fetched global encounter between supply and demand and that in addition subordinates the issuance and renewal of residence permits to the difficult possession of a regular contract of employment. Such factors end up causing and reproducing the cycle of *illegal immigration*. In turn, this serves to justify the existence of the Centri d'Identificazione ed Espulsione (Centres for Identification and Deportation), *extra-ordinem* facilities originally established in 1998 by the Turco-Napolitano Law as Centri di Permanenza Temporanea (Temporary Detention Centres).

Administrative detention, reserved for *non-E.U.* persons who are found to be in Italy *illegally*, blatantly violates the basic principles of the rule of law and the constitution. This administrative detention is in fact reserved for a special category of people without any verification of criminal offences and individual responsibility. This constitutes therefore, as a notable number of lawyers have argued, a type of *set of differentiated rights* framed within the paradigm of the '*criminal law of the enemy*'.

In addition to this, is the fact that Italian integration policies are not only very weak, but also have the peculiarity of assuming, be it implicitly or unconsciously, the worse aspects of other European models. These policies are analogous to the old model found in Germany, in the sense that immigrants are in substance considered and dealt with as *gastarbeiter* (guest workers), i.e., as a temporary workforce.

Furthermore, these policies are *assimilationist* in the sense that whilst they assert compliance to an Italian system of culture and values they do not furnish any rights to citizenship. Moreover, these policies are also *multi-culturalist*, yet only in the sense that they tend to *ethnicise* minorities of immigrant origin, i.e., consider them on the basis of their origins, '*ethnic groups*' and cultures, however without there being any adequate recognition of cultural diversity and religion at a public level. On this and other topics related to xenophobia and racism, see Rivera (Rivera, 2003, 2009, 2010).

The list of issues raised includes, different legal status; economic insecurity; social marginality to the point segregation; denial of basic human rights along with discrimination in many areas from jobs and housing to services in addition to deprivation of voting rights and hence political participation. All of these factors, hand in hand with the work done by the media and '*political racism*', serve to increase the negative images of *foreigners* and thus makes them more vulnerable to xenophobia and racism. It is the classic vicious circle of institutional racism and the popular media as described in classic analyses (Van Dijk, 1989).

Such a vicious cycle is not inevitable nor is it unbreakable. In the realm of civil society, social relations and some institutions, especially state schools and some local authorities, finally and against all odds, after nearly four decades of immigration, openings are beginning to be made and consolidated that are characterised by exchange, processes of *métissage* (acculturation) and anti-discrimination policies.

Camps of nomads, or the planning of contempt

In terms of racism, the fact cannot be avoided that the minority group who are most despised, stigmatised, discriminated and marginalised, even segregated, are the Roma and the Sinti, hastily referred to as '*gypsies*', who represent the victims of structural racism in Italy. It also needs to be borne in mind that the Italian legal system does not provide for any official recognition of these populations as ethnic and linguistic minorities whose rights would as such be protected under Art. 6 of the Italian Constitution amongst other things. It may also be added that Italy is the only Country in Europe to have so highly elevated and institutionalised the system of the so-called *campi di nomadi*, a perfect manifestation of discrimination and prejudice that would see these peoples as nomadic by *nature* and *vocation* (Brunello, 1996). It is a system of ghettos, mostly degraded and placed in urban peripheries that are already extremely degraded themselves. This system is organised and supported publicly in order to segregate the '*gypsies*' and thus it deprives them of the opportunity to work, participate in Italian life or have any real contact and relationship with the majority of society.

The repertoire of prejudice as far as the Roma and the Sinti are concerned ranges from acts of discrimination, violations of basic human rights, threats and attacks and even incitement to *lynching* by some authority figures and representatives of political parties. This repertoire of prejudice is indeed so vast that several volumes would not be enough to document it. Amongst other things, routine events in the life of the Roma and the Sinti include police raids in their *campi*, executed with such brutal methods as to resemble round-ups and forced evictions added to which the systematic destruction of their settlements and property, all of which are often followed by deportation. For some years in Italy, institutional anti-tziganist policy, based on evictions and deportations, has been carried out

through periodical decrees of a *state-of-emergency*, a measure that should normally apply only to cases of severe natural disasters such as earthquakes. The '*nomad emergency*' is essentially a measure that compares the presence of a few thousand '*undesirables*' to a natural disaster. It is enough to consider that in Rome, a city characterised by this kind of policy, Roma in the various *campi of nomads*, according to the municipality, come to a figure of just over 7000 in a total population of 3.5 million people, a figure which is amongst the lowest in Europe.

Nevertheless, some data do suggest, in contrast, just how much and to what extent this discrimination and segregation of the Roma and the Sinti is based on mere rumour and myth, starting with the myth of *nomadism* itself. After the 16th century, some 80% of so-called '*gypsies*' have never strayed beyond their European Country and in some Italian regions they have been settled since at least the 15th century. Today, according to the Italian Ministry of the Interior, families who still travel by caravan, and as such may be classified as nomadic, represent only 2-3% of the Roma people.

According to the *Commission of Experts* established by the Council of Europe, between 170- 180000 Roma live in Italy, i.e., just 0.23% of the total population. Amongst these, at least 70000 would be Italian citizens, according to data from the Italian Ministry of Labour. More than half of these are children and young people under 16 years of age. Hunger, cold, marginalisation, disease, fires and discrimination even deny them the right to grow old with as little as 2% reaching the age of 60.

Yet, as has been stated, most represent an integral part of the Italian history and society. If we limit ourselves to a glance at contemporary history, suffice it to say that there were many Roma and Sinti who participated in the resistance against fascism. Amongst the few biographies of

those of whom we know, we could mention the Piedmontese Sinti, Amilcare Debar, known as Taro, who died on December 12th, 2010. Other than Taro, mention should at least be made of the Istrian Roma Giuseppe Levakovic, who fought in the 'Osoppo'; Rubino Bonora, a partisan of the Nannetti Division in Friulia, Giuseppe Catter, who was shot at twenty years of age by the Blackshirt Brigades in Colle San Bartolomeo (Imperia) and his cousin Walter "Vampa" Catter, who was shot in Vicenza on November 11th, 1944 together with three other Sinti, Lino Ercole Festini, Silvio Paina and Renato Mastini. At the age of 17, Taro was a messenger for the partisans. After luckily escaping death by firing squad, he became a partisan fighter and served in the Langhe zone of Piedmont, going by the name of '*Corsaro*' (corsair/pirate). He also served in the Dante di Nanni Battalion of the 48th Garibaldi Brigade under the command of Pompeo Colajanni. Captured by the Nazis in 1944, he was deported to Mauthausen and then Auschwitz from whence he was liberated in 1945. During the postwar era Debar was representative of his people at the United Nations in Geneva.

Although honoured and highly decorated, Taro, like other Roma and Sinti survivors of the death camps, lived until the end of his days in a *camp of nomads*. In 2008, during a massive campaign aimed at the mass institutional *ethnic* profiling (fingerprinting) of Roma and Sinti in Italy, even former internees and deportees of the Nazi and fascist concentration camps were registered along with young children.

The fact that the *special treatment* meted out on the Roma, culminating in extermination under the Nazi regime, has for a long time been neglected and hidden from the public, is indicative of the widespread contempt or indifference towards this minority. According to some scholars, the

victims numbered approximately 500000, to which should be added the victims of mass murder in the Baltic and the Balkans, not only by the Nazis, but also by local collaborators. Sybil Milton (Milton, 1991), historian at the *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, Washington, has estimated between 220000 to 500000 victims; Ian Hancock, director of the *Romani Archives and Documentation Center*, University of Texas, Austin, has hypothesised a number between 500000 to 1500000. On the *Porrajmos* see, amongst others, Boursier et al. (1996), Bravi (2002) and Lewy (2002). Only in relatively recent years has the '*Porrajmos*', as the *holocaust* is called in the Romany language, begun to be the subject of studies and analyses. With regard to Italy, although there is no lack of historical works on the anti-tziganist policies implemented by the Mussolini regime (Boursier, 1996, 2001) and in particular the internment of Roma and Sinti in the concentration camps (Agnone, Berra, Boiano, Tossicia, Tremiti, etc.) and their expulsion, it is only in rare cases that these works have been written by academic historians.

The fabrication of territorial '*simulacra*' to the exclusion of the '*others*'

It is true that almost everywhere, nation states, even those with a long history of immigration and experience as *host Countries*, today tend to resolve issues concerning migrants and minorities in an increasingly exclusionary manner; limiting the rights of citizens and encouraging their isolation, if not segregation. In addition, in Italy there is still a relatively high level of social acceptability in terms of racist dialogue and behaviour, something that has been condemned by numerous reports by official bodies and international groups set up to monitor and combat racism

and defend the rights of migrants and minorities. This espousal of racism may be explained not only on the historical grounds that have been mentioned, but also through another singular element, that is to say the role in central and local government that has long been played by one political party in particular, the *Lega Nord* (Northern League), an exponent of racism at a political level par excellence. Consequently, the propaganda work carried out by this political group has indeed helped to trivialise racism and intolerance.

Before touching on the theme of the fabrication of territorial '*simulacra*' such as the '*Padania*', it needs to be said that racism is a complex and often subtle system of social and civil inequality, defined by strong differences of power and status between the respective social groups concerned. Therefore, ignorance, prejudice and fear alone are not sufficient as explanations. The sentiments prevailing in the '*racist community*', to use the formula of Etienne Balibar (1991), are rather to be seen as frustration, resentment and rancour nourished by a sense of uncertainty, frustration, helplessness and loss in the face of change in society as well as an economic, social and identity crisis (Bonomi, 2008).

The combination of these phenomena of globalisation certainly serve to render each localised identity precarious and impermanent, heightening a feeling of uncertainty and insecurity with regard to any sense of *belonging*. The greater the local dimension and the loss of any ability to create sense and give meaning to social life then the more it affirms the trend to fabricate regional *simulacra* in order to create barriers that exclude and alienate the *strangers*. In this way ideologies and identity politics based upon ethnicity entrench themselves as localised *fictions* that often give rise to social exclusion and the symbolic idea of the *others*. Paradoxically, it is in this way that the loss of *community* may be compensated by the construction of the *racist community*.

This is exactly what has happened in some parts of Italy, especially those in which the ideology of the *Lega Nord* is (or was) dominant and whose ideology has influenced the activities and regulations of the respective local administrations.

It ought to be noted that the invention of the *Lega Nord* ideology was the handiwork of a political class who primarily represented the interests of the small to medium business enterprises in an area which, since the early 1990s, has been hit by rapid economic and social change and restructuring. It is not by mere chance that some scholars define *Lega Nord* ideology with the expression *ethno-capitalism*. *Ethnic* and *localist* myths and rhetoric have even had the effect of bringing together different, or even opposing, interests. First, the interests of the employers who dream of a totally *flexible* world but also of certain strata of the working class disillusioned by the *Left* and trade unions. Both of these have in turn been affected by the effects of neo-liberal restructuring, with the first as long time winners and the second as losers.

Today, now that the financial and economic crisis and the subsequent recession resulting from political austerity measures is also affecting the productive structure of the Country, especially the North-East, where *Lega Nord* ideology has achieved its greatest levels of success, the effective hegemony of this *organisation of intolerance* is in decline and in such is at least one of the few positive effects of the crisis.

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