The Roma in Italian Documentary Films

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Since the new millennium, Italian film-makers have been sensitive to the increasing anti-Roma hostility within Italy's sociopolitical climate and have given the Roma and Sinti increasing visibility in their work, featuring them as protagonists or in subsidiary roles in over forty documentaries and fiction films. This essay[1] assesses the extent to which recent Italian documentaries might be categorised as counter-hegemonic and politically progressive in their depictions of the Roma. How successfully do these films practice ideology critique? Mike Wayne defines this process as 'exposing the way antagonisms generated by the dominant social interests of a capitalist society (capital and state) are concealed, displaced and rationalized.'[2] In the light of writings by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Graziella Parati concerning the problematic cohesion, agency, and self-representation within subaltern groups, what progress has Italian documentary cinema made in outlining more progressive societal configurations with the Roma at their heart? How effectively have film-makers subverted reductive institutional perspectives on the Roma, emphasising instead the notion of 'whoness,' 'the unrepeatable individuality of a self that has little place in philosophy and finds its ideal location in narratives, in the process of telling a story'?[3] As a secondary strand of the essay's evaluation of the effectiveness of twenty-first-century Roma documentaries as politicised art, it also assesses how creatively and systematically films have assimilated the findings of a corpus of recent sociological writings, anthropological fieldwork, and investigative reports by NGOs and charities that examine the impact of institutional determinants upon the Roma.

1 This essay is a substantially re-worked version of the article "The Roma on Screen: Voicing the Counter-hegemonic," published in: Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies 4.1 (2016), pp. 63–81.

2 Wayne, Mike: Documentary as Critical and Creative Research, in: Austin, Thomas / De Jong, Wilma (eds.): Rethinking Documentary. New Perspectives and Practices, Maidenhead 2008, pp. 82–94, here p. 89.

3 Parati, Graziella: Migration Italy. The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture, Toronto 2005, p. 18.

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It will be suggested that many recent documentaries have successfully articulated counter-hegemonic representations of the Roma and Sinti, and have generated different forms of emancipatory momentum. One strand of work, characterised by documentaries such as Pierluigi De Donno and Claudio Giagnotti's *Gitanistan – lo stato immaginario dei rom salentini/'Gitanistan – the imaginary state of Roma from the Salento area'* (2014), has provided both a valuable socio-historical reaffirmation of the Roma's centuries-old presence on the Italian peninsula, and a counter narrative to contest media reports that magnify episodes of tension between Italy's different ethnicities to serve the populist agenda of political parties such as the Lega Nord/Northern League. A second strand of documentary work – the focus of this essay – highlights certain difficulties faced by other Roma communities in Italy, particularly recent Eastern European Roma migrants and also second- and third-generation Italian Roma. These films outline their aspirations for forms of constructive, long-term, sedentary integration to reflect the tranquil lifestyles of the Roma entrepreneurs depicted in De Donno and Giagnotti's documentary, and how these objectives clash with the harmful emphasis on 'nomadism,' spatial marginalisation, and short-term strategies espoused by the Italian State and regional politicians.

A vein of films beginning with *Io? Maschio/'Me? Male'*[4] – a thoughtful, interview-based short film depicting the aspirations of female Roma in Gioia Tauro – has sensitively explored the dual subalternity experienced by Roma women. One cause of this is the socio-economic marginalisation that can affect certain poorer Roma communities, and another factor is the patriarchal influence that conditions the women's particular community. The affliction of patriarchy indisputably continues to affect 'majority' society in multiple areas including women's career opportunities and development, and in addition to this, the self-determination of Roma women can also sometimes be curtailed by manifestations of patriarchy within Roma traditions relating to education and early marriage. At times, however, documentaries have fallen short, through limited resources and access, in investigating disturbing socio-environmental phenomena affecting the Roma – such as their exposure to environmental health hazards, and the vulnerability of Roma children to forced adoption – which remain relatively unarticulated in cinematic terms. While the essay shares Mauro Sassi's reservations regarding the effectiveness of cinema in channelling information within society's changing public sphere,[5] it nevertheless outlines

4 *Io? Maschio/'Me? Male'* (D: Elisabetta Careri, and Paolo Tripodi, Italy, Gioia Tauro: Laboratorio Video Me-Ti 2001). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the original Italian are mine.

5 Sassi, Mauro: Politica e sfera pubblica nel documentario italiano contemporaneo: il caso di Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo/Politics and the Public Sphere in Contemporary Italian

how film projects generate a progressive impetus to reverse the subaltern, disadvantaged positions of many Italian and European Roma.

Nomadic myths: the Roma, employment, and education

The recurrent term of 'nomads' with which the Roma, Sinti, and related groups are labelled – despite 97 per cent of the Roma within Italy being sedentary[6] – is motivated by a clear politico-economic agenda. Nando Sigona notes that the media's use of the term during the exodus of Roma from Kosovo in 1999 effectively denied them refugee status.[7] This, together with an institutional dissemination of the misleading notion that the Roma desire an itinerant camp-based lifestyle,[8] has enabled the Italian authorities to avoid any electorally damaging socio-economic commitment towards the integration of Roma groups who have travelled to Italy in recent decades to seek refuge from discrimination and war. The nomadic myth has been reinforced by regional administrations acting on stereotypical assumptions about Roma lifestyles, and therefore focusing on the provision of camp-based accommodation for Yugoslavian Roma who arrived in Italy from the 1980s onwards.[9] Other observers have attributed the construction of such camps to mutual incomprehension between the Roma and local authorities in Italy.[10] However, the issue of ideology – in terms of dominant hegemonies creating reductive generalisations to suit their own agendas – is arguably relevant to the issue of the provision of temporary accommodation for Roma groups who have fled from other areas of Europe, and it also underlies the Italian State's mode of interaction with long-established communities of Roma and other ethnic groups. Through their visual articulation of research by academics and pro-Roma associations, post-2000 Italian documentaries

Documentaries. The Case of Carlo Giuliani, Boy, in: Hope, William / Serra, Silvana / D'Arcangeli, Luciana (eds.): Un nuovo cinema politico italiano? / A New Italian Political Cinema?, vol. 2, Leicester 2014, pp. 117–118.

6 European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC): Parallel Report by the European Roma Rights Centre concerning Italy, Budapest 2017, p. 3.

7 Sigona, Nando: Figli del ghetto: gli italiani, i campi nomadi e l'invenzione degli zingari / Sons of the Ghetto. The Italians, Nomad Camps and the Invention of Gypsies, Civezzano 2002, pp. 32–34.

8 Sigona: Figli, p. 36.

9 European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC): Italia: rapporto del centro europeo per i diritti dei rom. Profilo del Paese, 2011–2012 / Italy: Report of the European Roma Rights Centre. Country Profile, 2011–2012, Budapest 2013, p. 17.

10 Saitta, Pietro: Immigrant Roma in Sicily. The Role of the Informal Economy in Producing Social Advancement, in: Romani Studies 20.1 (2010), pp. 17–45, here p. 37.

have attempted to deconstruct the pernicious, institutionally sponsored short-termism that penalises the Roma in areas including employment, education, and health.

Many documentaries exploring the Roma's limited access to social services use qualitative interviewing as research tools[11] to elicit individual perspectives and analyse community values. This approach, rather than using narration, archival footage, or dramatic reconstruction, is necessitated by limited budgets and by many film-makers wanting to readjust the status differential between marginalised interviewees and the privileged interviewer. The technique creates what Capussotti terms 'a space for subjectivity'[12] – a distillation of Parati's notion of 'whoness' – which accentuates the interviewees' individuality and aspirations in a valid counter-hegemonic initiative against political and journalistic tendencies to reduce the Roma to a faceless, semi-parasitic mass sidelined from late-capitalist society. The noble simplicity of the interviewees' long-term aspirations, such as Constantin Suliman's desire for employment and a secure future for his children in *Mandiamoli a casa 2 – I luoghi comuni/'Let's send them home 2 – Commonplaces,'*[13] contrasts with the film's depiction of vulnerable individuals reluctantly postponing strategic preparation for the future in favour of expedients to achieve temporary security in the present. This is a legacy of Southern Europe's defective welfare systems.[14]

There is a disjunction between the intrinsic normality of the Roma's aspirations towards social stability and mobility and the impoverished conditions of the informal, unauthorised camps represented in films such as *Via San Dionigi, 93: Storia di un campo rom/'Via San Dionigi, 93: Story of a Roma camp.'*[15] This also develops from a cumulative use of 'the prioritisation of the mundane occurrence over the monumental event,'[16] a technique illustrated in several understated sequences of *Container 158,*[17] which gradually disclose the bureaucratic mire obstructing young Brenda Salkanovic's application for Italian citizenship and Remi Salkanovic's desire to work as a mechanic. *Miracolo*

11 Wayne: Documentary, pp. 82–94.

12 Capussotti, Enrica: Moveable Identities. Migration, Subjectivity and Cinema in Contemporary Italy, in: Modern Italy 14.1 (2009), pp. 55–68, here p. 61.

13 *Mandiamoli a casa 2 – I luoghi comuni/'Let's Send Them Home 2 – Commonplaces'* (D: Sara Marconi, and Francesco Mele, Italy, Turin 2011).

14 Costi, Natassa: The Spectre That Haunts Italy. The Systematic Criminalisation of the Roma and the Fears of the Heartland, in: Romani Studies 20.2 (2010), pp. 105–136, here p. 130.

15 *Via San Dionigi, 93: Storia di un campo rom/'Via San Dionigi, 93: Story of a Roma Camp'* (D: Tonino Curagi, and Anna Gorio, Italy, Milan 2007).

16 Bruzzi, Stella: New Documentary, Abingdon 2006, p. 79.

17 *Container 158/'Container 158'* (D: Stefano Liberti, and Enrico Parenti, Italy, Rome 2013).

alla Scala/'Miracle at the Scala'[18] and *Mamma rom/'Mother Rom'*[19] also use a format that Silvio Carta[20] classes as 'revelatory' rather than 'expository'; they depict chronological progressions of events and privilege the 'emotional affinities' that evolve between the film-makers and subjects.

Documentaries that explore the education of Roma youngsters also untangle the ideological contradictions that compromise the notional benefits of scolarisation asserted by the institutions. Taking the city of Rome as an example, after a census identified over half the Roma community as being under 18, 'schooling was presented as one of the cornerstones of the council's integration policy,'[21] and the council also threatened to evict the parents of Roma children who failed to attend. Marco Solimene's fieldwork[22] analyses the Roma's scepticism towards any supposed 'instruments of emancipation' offered by the institutions. This stems from the incompatibility between the short-term subsistence existences lived by poorer Roma groups who have recently migrated to Italy from other countries – the input of youngsters in learning trades and supporting their families being vital – and the speculative, market-driven, institutional agenda predicated on training and educating young Roma to acquire skilled, technical jobs. In a saturated employment market notorious for anti-Roma discrimination,[23] these jobs rarely materialise.

The 21 July Association has coordinated the short films *Da Barbiana al campo nomadi: I bambini rom e la scuola/'From Barbiana to the nomad camp: Roma children and school'*[24] and *I bambini rom, la scuola e il piano nomadi di Roma/'Roma children, school and Rome's nomad plan.'*[25] The organisation's research has been integrated within these short films to enable them to be used as activist resources. *Da Barbiana* deploys positivist and interpretative

18 *Miracolo alla Scala/'Miracle at the Scala'* (D: Claudio Bernieri, Italy, Milan 2011).

19 *Mamma rom/'Mother Rom'* (D: Antonella Cristofaro, and Vincenzo Valentino, Italy, Rome 2012).

20 Carta, Silvio: Orientalism in the Documentary Representation of Culture, in: Visual Anthropology 24.5 (2011), pp. 403–420.

21 Clough Marinaro, Isabella: Integration or Marginalization? The Failures of Social Policy for the Roma in Rome, in: Modern Italy 8.2 (2003), pp. 203–218, here p. 208.

22 Solimene, Marco: Undressing the Gağé Clad in State Garb. Bosnian Xoraxané Romá Face to Face with the Italian Authorities, in: Romani Studies 23.2 (2013), pp. 161–186, here p. 163.

23 The highest levels of anti-Roma discrimination in employment contexts occur in the Czech Republic and Italy; ERRC: Italia, p. 10.

24 *Da Barbiana al campo nomadi: I bambini rom e la scuola/'From Barbiana to the Nomad Camp: Roma Children and School'* (D: Ermelinda Coccia, Andrea Cottini, and Davide Falcione, Italy, Rome 2011).

25 *Rom, cittadini dell'Italia che verrà – La storia di Kemo/'The Roma, Citizens of Tomorrow's Italy – Kemo's Story'* (Associazione 21 luglio / 21 July Association, Italy, Rome 2012).

approaches,[26] and uses a quantitative analysis of data regarding Roma underachievement at school, the statistics being articulated visually and also via Doriana Chierici's sardonic voice-over. The film's qualitative approach is integrated through a case study of young Aisha who lives at Rome's Via Salone camp. The documentary dissects the institutional branding of Aisha as 'aggressive,' tracing the impact of issues including the education that is missed because the council-funded bus delivers her to school late and collects her early, and the difficulty of completing homework within a cramped camp home. While it should be acknowledged that the expository non-Roma voice-over excludes Roma input from the film's soundtrack, *Da Barbiana,* as an effective political documentary, links what could be construed as reassuring images (Aisha's domestic routine and school journey) firmly to her marginalised reality to minimise any slippage between image and referent in a notoriously depoliticised and manipulative mediascape.

The Roma's employment prospects remain precarious; employers who consciously or inadvertently hire undocumented workers are heavily penalised and regular employment consequently eludes many Roma. The poorer Roma remain marginalised from Italy's neo-liberal labour market, their activities centring on artisanship, mechanical repair work, musicianship, and small-scale drug dealing.[27] Recent documentaries have generated political impetus by investigating the Roma's employment situation, dismantling the box-ticking futility of institutional initiatives and revealing through on-screen interviews the Roma's strategies for securing jobs. *Zingarò, una sartoria rom a Carbonia/'Zingarò, a Roma dressmakers' shop in Carbonia'*[28] is set in Sardinia and follows several Roma women who participate in a training project focusing on dressmaking. *Zingarò* contrasts its visual refrain of close-ups of the women's manual dexterity, which ranges from kneading bread and intricate needlework to constructing homes, with their increasingly abstract and economically precarious work experience project. The camera captures politically salient moments such as the terse questioning of an NGO coordinator about the project's future, the film-makers critiquing the ideology of neo-liberal entrepreneurship when applied, absurdly, to the marginalised in Italy's poorest regions during an economic crisis induced by capitalism. Predictably, at the project's conclusion, the women are unable to take on the dressmaking business and its financial overheads, and return to their former, transient sources of employment.

26 Wayne: Documentary, pp. 82–94.

27 Saitta: Roma, p. 24.

28 *Zingarò, una sartoria rom a Carbonia/'Zingarò, a Roma Dressmakers Shop in Carbonia'* (D: Nicola Contini, Nicoletta Nesler, and Marilisa Piga, Italy, Cagliari 2011).

Other documentaries that explore the Roma's experiences in the employment sector are predicated on personal testimony via on-screen interviews, notably *Racav lavor/'I'm looking for work.'*[29] Antonia Stepich acknowledges that the concealment of her Roma origins during job interviews led to her employment as a health visitor in Milan. A conversation with 20-year-old Luigi Ciarella features a significant *mise-en-scène* in which the elegant youth recounts his unsuccessful job interviews against a darkened background. This visual approach highlights Luigi's qualities, momentarily decontextualising him from the reductive ethnic, social, and economic value systems that underpin dominant ideologies. It is more effective than the *mise-en-scène* used in several short films sharing the collective title *Rom, cittadini dell'Italia che verrà/'The Roma, citizens of tomorrow's Italy.'*[30] Despite its progressive intentions, work such as *Rom, cittadini dell'Italia che verrà – La storia di Kemo/'The Roma, citizens of tomorrow's Italy – Kemo's story,'*[31] promotes an assimilationist agenda, initially concealing Kemo Hamidovic's identity as he is filmed preparing perfect cappuccinos in a bar, then subsequently in locations ranging from his modern apartment to a nightclub dance floor. Such approaches evoke Spivak's notion of 'recognition by assimilation,' where an irreducible European ethnocentricism pervades the constitution of the Other,[32] this perception being reinforced as Kemo equates his Roma heritage with socio-economic poverty. Assimilation is essentially a fragmented, individualistic approach to secure one's own future rather than that of one's community. Sigona[33] cites the Roma's attempts to merge with the dominant ethnic groups in Kosovo, but the strategy only brought short-term economic benefits because they were never fully accepted and the possibility of collective sociopolitical action was lost. Therefore, while the duration and modes of address of such films are strategically valid as regards sensitising 'unconverted' viewers,[34] shorts like *La storia di Kemo* betray intrinsic, unresolved tensions between the emancipation of the individual and that of the group.

29 *Racav lavor/'I'm Looking for Work'* (D: Marco Carraro, Emiliana Poce, Paolo Poce, and Francesco Scarpelli, Italy, Milan 2001).

30 Associazione 21 luglio: Rom.

31 Ibid.

32 Spivak, Gayatri C.: Can the Subaltern Speak?, in: Williams, Patrick / Chrisman, Laura (eds.): Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory. A Reader, New York 1994, pp. 66–112, here pp. 89–90.

33 Sigona: Figli, p. 25.

34 Corner, John: Documenting the Political. Some Issues, in: Studies in Documentary Film 3.2 (2009), pp. 113–129, here p. 125.

Voicing the female Roma

The Roma endure manifold forms of subalternity. Historically, theirs is the 'forgotten' holocaust, and their presence in mainstream, hegemonic historical accounts is minimal and often discriminatory. Economically, the Roma groups that have arrived in Italy in recent decades remain marginalised from capitalist society and consumerism. Politically, their close intra-community ties and scepticism towards collective political organisation complicate potentially beneficial interaction with natural allies, such as the politically active sections of Italy's proletariat and with trade unions. Demographically, they are an outsider minority in any 'nation state.' For female Roma, these disadvantages can be compounded by a specific brand of patriarchy that structures certain Roma communities across Europe. At times, fieldwork access needs to be negotiated with male Roma to avoid 'inappropriate' interaction with women;[35] young brides are sometimes commodified and exchanged for dowries;[36] and a woman's socio-symbolic role in community gatherings can be marginal and subservient.[37] Within Italy's Roma communities, patriarchal influences have sometimes discouraged public education for girls, their mothers being more constructive interlocutors with Italian schools,[38] and Roma communities have also been known to ostracise women who denounce domestic violence.[39]

New millennium Italian documentaries attempt to disclose the structures of oppression that restrict the emancipation of Roma women both beyond and within their communities, although many such sequences are also characterised by 'structuring absences.'[40] These often centre on intra-community patriarchal influences that are merely implied by female interviewees or on the disappearance of male Roma from family environments. During an interview with Romanì Cirelli in *Racav lavor,* an early twenty-first-century documentary (2001a), she refers to male Roma discouraging the education of girls and pressuring them into begging for money, but no counter-response is solicited from male community members in this or any Italian documentary in which issues of male domination emerge. While film-makers are justifiably rigorous in denouncing institutional failings that affect the education of Roma children

35 Levinson, Martin / Sparkes, Andrew: Gypsy Identity and Orientations to Space, in: Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 33.6 (2004), pp. 704–734, here p. 708.

36 Tesăr, Cătălina: Becoming Rom (Male), Becoming Romni (Female) among Romanian Cortorari Roma. On Body and Gender, in: Romani Studies 22.2 (2012), pp. 113–140, here pp. 113–115.

37 Ibid., p. 136.

38 Associazione 21 luglio / 21 July Association: Linea 40: la scuolabus per soli bambini rom / Line 40: The School Bus for Roma Children Only, Rome 2001, p. 35.

39 Ibid., p. 37.

40 Chanan, Michael: Filming the Invisible, in: Austin, Thomas / De Jong, Wilma (eds.): Rethinking Documentary. New Perspectives and Practices, Maidenhead 2008, pp. 121–132, p. 124.

(*Da Barbiana* and *I bambini rom*), it is perhaps understandable that these projects' sociopolitical remit does not extend to questioning the internal dynamics of certain Roma communities. The result, however, is that a key intra-group antagonism is left unexplored in cinematic terms.

Sometimes patriarchal values are unquestioningly internalised and reproposed by matriarchal figures, exemplified in Laura Halilovic's *Io, la mia famiglia rom e Woody Allen/Me, My Gipsy Family and Woody Allen* (2009) as Halilovic's mother and grandmother harangue her on camera regarding the importance of marrying young. Even a recent film made by Roma film-makers, *Gitanistan,*[41] which depicts economically prosperous, long-established Roma entrepreneurs in south-east Italy, illustrates the extent to which female subalternity remains engrained. Claudio Giagnotti evocatively distils the professional expertise of his male relatives into the *mise-en-scène* of interviews, featuring them as they trade horses and work in their flourishing businesses. However, female interviewees are visually confined to domestic tropes–cooking, sewing, or sitting in peripheral positions during staged group interviews. Consequently, a greater emancipatory impetus emerges in films that articulate research on Roma women as mediators between their communities and local authorities in Italy, and in work where – through figures like the filmmaker Laura Halilovic – an organic, female Roma voice (albeit with the assistance of progressive, non-Roma organisations) secures an outlet.

Racav lavor and *Sastipe – star bene/'Feeling well,'*[42] document the work of Romanì Cirelli and other female Roma community health workers, highlighting the limited access of the more disadvantaged Roma families to health care in Italy's metropolises but also outlining a blueprint for intergroup collaboration that countries, including Ireland, subsequently assimilated.[43] *Sastipe* generates an informative dialectic by counterpointing on-screen interviews both with the Roma mediators who discuss their outreach work and with non-Roma intermediaries such as social workers who describe their valuable interaction with the mediators.[44] The formula of emancipatory micro-level collaborations between professionally and culturally gifted Roma women and progressive individuals within public and private sector organisations is also traceable in

41 *Gitanistan – lo stato immaginario dei rom salentini/'Gitanistan – the Imaginary State of Roma from the Salento Area*' (D: Pierluigi De Donno, and Claudio Giagnotti, Italy, Fermo 2014).

42 *Racav Lavor/'I'm Looking for Work'; Sastipe – Star bene/'Feeling well'* (D: Marco Carraro, Emiliana Poce, Paolo Poce, and Francesco Scarpelli, Italy, Milan 2001).

43 European Commission: Improving the Tools for the Social Inclusion and Non-Discrimination of Roma in the EU, Luxembourg 2010, p. 33.

44 The following films highlight other (male) Roma intermediary roles within sport and local political contexts: *Lovte/'Lovte'* (D: Andrea Camuffo, and Simone Spada, Italy, Rome 2003); *Caminante/'Caminante'* (D: Francesco Di Martino, Giuseppe Portuesi, Maria Vittoria Trovato, and Francesco Valvo, Italy 2013).

films including *La canzone di Rebecca/'Rebecca's Song'*[45] which portrays the developing career of the young Roma artist Rebecca Covaciu. But a particularly interesting case is that of Laura Halilovic, whose documentary *Me, My Gipsy Family and Woody Allen,* a collaboration with the Turin company Zenit Arti Audiovisive, was followed by the feature-length comedy *Io, rom romantica/'I'm a Romantic Roma'* (2014). These projects begin to transcend the problematic power relations and status differentials that often characterise film work about the Roma. This issue can generate tensions within the filmic space because projects animated by the imperatives and aesthetics of producers from majority Italian society – ranging from commercial companies to NGOs – do not necessarily reflect the priorities of the Roma as authors and subjects.

The case of Laura Halilovic, in the context of Roma subalternity, offers a potentially emancipatory solution to Spivak's concern about 'the first world intellectual masquerading as the absent non-representer who lets the oppressed speak for themselves,'[46] or, to use her incendiary phrase, the scenario of 'white men saving brown women from brown men.'[47] As an established intellectual, Spivak envisaged 'synecdochizing' herself by sidelining her privileges and status and re-immersing herself within Indian subalternity to form a collective and generate a progressive momentum.[48] However, the Roma community – particularly in Italy – has very few established figures to galvanise such a project. Although Halilovic's unequivocal sense of her Roma heritage and her gender-sensitive agency is a unique phenomenon within Italy's mediascape, she is not an organic intellectual in Gramscian terms, emerging to provide a voice for a subaltern group. Instead, her work is a cultural focal point for a progressive, multifaceted, and sometimes elusive twenty-first-century Roma identity that transcends the remit of films by certain Italian non-Roma directors that collapse the cultural, historical, and generational differences of the Roma, Sinti, and other groups into a generic anti-institutional discourse predicated on the socio-economic marginalisation of impoverished, recently arrived Roma migrants.

Io, la mia famiglia rom is Halilovic's meditation on her upbringing within a Roma community in Turin and on her growing passion for film-making. It incorporates significant quantities of external footage, ranging from 'found footage' from her father's home movies to historical archive film. Video images of a young Halilovic performing traditional Roma dances and playing amidst her community function as a cultural signifier, an unmanipulable document

45 *La canzone di Rebecca/'Rebecca's Song'* (D: Roberto Malini, Italy, Milan 2012).

46 Spivak: Subaltern, p. 87.

47 Spivak, Gayatri C.: Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular, in: Postcolonial Studies 8.4 (2005), pp. 475–486, here p. 478.

48 Ibid., p. 481.

of key moments in her identity formation that also become a personal archive 'where social memory is constructed.'[49] As Cuevas adds, embedded home movies offer 'valuable traces for the identity search of the film-makers, who return to their origins as a necessary framework for understanding themselves, especially when those roots arise from the crossing of diverse ethnic, religious or national identities.'[50] Halilovic's construction of her identity through the prism of the family unit – as invariably occurs when home movie footage is incorporated into filmic texts – constitutes a conscious politico-cultural counter-move; the harmonious sequences of community solidarity contrast with the hyperbolic media coverage of Roma groups during the Berlusconi government's discriminatory 'Nomad Emergency' of 2008, footage of which is also included.

But Halilovic's family-based identity formation triggers micro-level tensions as her emerging cinematic aspirations collide with her family's often conservative values, notably the pressure propelling her towards marriage. Michael Renov observes that 'the familial other helps to flesh out the very contours of the enunciating self, offering itself as a precursor, alter ego, double, instigator, spiritual guide and perpetrator of trauma.'[51] In films like *Gitanistan,* Claudio Giagnotti's elders are pioneering precursors who uphold Roma culture, having consolidated their community as entrepreneurs in the Apulia region. By contrast, *Io, la mia famiglia rom* emphasises the scale of the emancipatory challenge facing Roma women both within and beyond their communities. While cultural creativity gradually enables Laura Halilovic to wrest control of the filmic image from her father, his home movies being superseded by Halilovic's footage as she imposes her world-view and aspirations on the text, this self-realisation is overshadowed by the macro-level sociopolitical battle faced by the Roma. This issue comes to dominate the film's structure, as a key narrative strand – the impending eviction of Halilovic's relatives from an encampment – remains suspended and unresolved.

The unrepresented: beyond the horizons of documentary

Documentaries made by Italian non-Roma directors predominantly engage with the most visible, urgent socio-economic issues affecting the most vulnerable Roma groups across the Italian peninsula, but the films sometimes do not capture certain insidious phenomena – recorded in research by NGOs and charities – that continue to influence their lives. These include the

49 Cuevas, Efrén: Home Movies as Personal Archives in Autobiographical Documentaries, in: Studies in Documentary Film 17.1 (2013), pp. 17–29, here p. 18.

50 Ibid.

51 Renov, Michael: The Subject of Documentary, Minneapolis 2004, p. 228.

disturbingly high adoption rate of Roma children; the disquieting influence of certain individuals who purport to represent and 'lead' given Roma communities; the lucrative opportunities linked to the building of 'equipped' Roma camps and to the work of supposedly pro-Roma organisations; and the health risks caused by the proximity of camps (sometimes authorised by councils) to environmental hazards. The 21 July Association[52] has examined the case of the Villaggio della Solidarietà / Solidarity Village in Via della Cesarina to the north-east of Rome, which opened in 2003. Ten years later, its Roma communities were moved elsewhere, and asbestos contamination was detected in the area of the former camp. The proximity of a waste incinerator to the Via Salone camp is also well documented,[53] but apart from several images of children handling refuse and discarded objects in *Container 158*, and the unexpected encounter between the film-makers of *Biùtiful cauntri / 'Beautiful Country'*[54] and the occupants of a camp near a refuse tip in Giugliano, there has been negligible cinematic coverage of this issue. Motivations for this include the somewhat ghettoised cinematic status of eco-movies, which complicates possible synergies with marginalised subjects like the Roma; the difficulties of establishing adequate project durations and budgets, and the medical / legal complexities facing documentaries that analyse how environmental factors condition Roma communities.

The question of imposed adoptions within Italy's vulnerable minority groups is attaining visibility within research, particularly in the context of Roma communities. The problem emerged in late twentieth-century writing[55] and was investigated further in reports including 'Mia madre era rom: le adozioni dei minori rom in emergenza abitativa nella regione Lazio (2006–2012)' / 'My mother was a Roma: The adoptions of Roma children in critical living conditions in the Lazio Region (2006–2012).' This publication outlines the exponential adoption threat for Roma children, the Italian authorities categorising 6 per cent of them as 'at risk' and potentially adoptable, as opposed to 0.1 per cent of non-Roma children.[56] The absence of documentaries

52 Associazione 21 luglio / 21 July Association: Campi nomadi S.p.a. / Nomad Camps Ltd, Frosinone 2014.

53 European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC): Written Comments by the European Roma Rights Centre Concerning Italy, Budapest 2014, p. 4.

54 *Biùtiful cauntri / 'Beautiful Country'* (D: Esmeralda Calabria, Andrea D'Ambrosio, and Peppe Ruggiero, Italy, Milan 2008).

55 Revelli, Marco: Fuori luogo: Cronaca di un campo rom / Out of Place: Chronicle of a Roma Camp, Turin 1999, pp. 63–65.

56 Associazione 21 luglio / 21 July Association: Mia madre era Rom: le adozioni dei minori rom in emergenza abitativa nella regione Lazio (2006–2012) / My Mother Was a Roma: The Adoptions of Roma Children in Critical Living Conditions in the Lazio Region (2006–2012), Frosinone 2013, pp. 117–118.

investigating this delicate issue will only be remedied by intra-group Roma initiatives that manage to access such scarred family environments, assuming that this issue is considered a priority by the few Roma film-makers who currently produce films in Italy.

Another unrepresented problem concerns individuals who dominate certain Roma communities, controlling community interaction with the local authorities, monopolising the resources provided,[57] and creating 'circles of redistributive dependency.'[58] The European Commission has condemned the lack of transparency and gender balance in the selection of the Roma interlocutors who negotiate with local authorities (2010: 23), and the issue flared up when threats were made by a self-styled Roma 'leader,' who objected to the discussion of certain aspects of 'his' camp during a public meeting.[59] Documentaries occasionally feature brief footage of male-only Roma camp committees; one sequence in *Via San Dionigi* is interrupted by an elderly Roma woman who criticises the other women for not maintaining camp hygiene, but filmic access to the meetings between the cliques that run certain camps and their institutional equivalents is naturally off-limits.

Similarly, there has been minimal documentary analysis of the lucrative contracts to build and provide security for the 'equipped' camps – an economic absurdity when their construction contradicts national and European strategies for Roma inclusion[60] and costs much more than renovating existing buildings.[61] This process has been termed 'an uncontrolled and unregulated stream of public money that flows into the "camp system" in Rome,'[62] and in a cinematic context it demands the investigative verve of a Michael Moore. Existing work can only linger meaningfully on moments of social antagonism, exemplified by a sequence in *I bambini rom,* where an interviewee speaks contemptuously of the 'profiteering' of one cooperative that receives funding from Rome's local authorities; the scale of hegemonic power and self-enrichment remains, however, beyond the confines of the film text. The issues of forced adoption, environmental health hazards, hierarchical power in Roma communities, and the misuse of accommodation funds have all emerged in research conducted by academics, NGOs, and

57 Solimene: Undressing, p. 167.

58 ERRC: Italia, pp. 39–40.

59 Di Cesare, Loredana / Episcopo, Mauro: Roma, capo Rom minaccia presidente Onlus: "Ti mando in coma se parli del mio campo" / Rome: Roma Leader Threatens Head of Non-Profit Organization: "I'll Knock You Out If You Talk about My Camp," accessible at: http://tv.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/07/18/roma-capo-rom-minaccia-presidente-onlus-ti-mando-in-coma-se-parli-del-mio-campo/289231/. [Accessed: 17.11.2019].

60 ERRC: Italia, p. 9.

61 Associazione 21 luglio: Campi, pp. 68–70.

62 Ibid., p. 18.

advocacy groups. But it must be acknowledged that these questions, and the agendas than underpin them, have mainly been established by non-Roma groups and individuals.

Despite their limitations, the existing forms of documentary work on the Roma nevertheless play a role of sociopolitical sensitisation within an Italian media environment marked by anti-Roma prejudice. In 2013, the 21 July Association[63] identified over 850 cases of misinformation including incitement to hatred and lazy journalism based on stereotypical assumptions, and more recently the European Roma Rights Centre has documented a series of examples of hate speech by public officials including politicians from the Northern League party.[64] While Mauro Sassi expresses reservations regarding the effectiveness of documentaries as informative counter-hegemonic tools in a public sphere vastly different from that outlined by Habermas,[65] many films provide an important dissemination of the investigative research into anti-Roma discrimination carried out by charities, humanitarian groups, and academics. Several other emancipatory documentaries, authored by Roma film-makers themselves, endow the Roma with individual and collective voices that simultaneously articulate their cultural traditions and emphasise the Roma's central societal role within Italy over many generations. Films such as those written and directed by Laura Halilovic and produced by established Italian production companies typify the successful collaborations that have started to emerge between Roma artists and the progressive elements of the dominant cultures in countries where the Roma reside; a micro-level solidarity with the potential to develop into something more politically substantial.

63 Associazione 21 luglio / 21 July Association: Rapporto annuale 2013 / Annual Report 2013, Rome 2013, p. 10.

64 ERRC: Parallel Report, pp. 8–11.

65 Sassi: Politica, pp. 117–118.